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**THE  
EMERGENCE  
OF  
GENERATION WE**



## ➤ Images of Hope

**We live in a cynical world. Many of those reading these pages are already immersed in doubt and despair. They're ready to dismiss the vision we're trying to evoke by calling it "naive," "unrealistic," or "utopian." They're eager to deny the potential for greatness contained in Generation We and to condemn today's youth to living out their lives in the same quagmire of quiet desperation their parents have experienced.**

Life is tough, and the challenges Generation We will face are profoundly difficult. We know that. But we also know that the resources the Millennials will bring to the struggle are impressive. What's more, there are already signs the Millennials are beginning to rise to the challenge.

Deeply affected by the terror attacks of 9/11, the disastrous Iraq War, the horror of Hurricane Katrina, and the cynical dishonesty of the Bush administration, Generation We is already responding with their unique brand of social and political awareness. Using data from the GMS and other studies, as well as evidence from news stories and emerging trends that are popping up around us on an almost daily basis, we can see how the Millennials are beginning to shape their world, giving a foretaste of the changes to come.

As we've already mentioned, Generation We is history's most active volunteering generation. They are looking for—and finding—ways to change the world, redefining the boundary lines between work, education, government, charity, and politics through social entrepreneurship and creative new forms of business. They are also forming international bonds, combining their unprecedented opportunities to see the world with new planetary perspective on the issues and problems faced by humankind.

*"A small body of determined spirits fired by an unquenchable faith in their mission can alter the course of history."*

MOHANDAS K. GANDHI

Generation We is also using the power of the purse to influence business, shaping their consuming activities to influence the behavior of major corporations. For example, the widespread outrage that brought down the Boomer-beloved radio shock jock Don Imus in 2007 was initially sparked by a Millennial activist, Ryan Chiachiere. Working for the website Media Matters for America, the 26-year-old Chiachiere found the offensive video clip of Imus using racial and sexual stereotypes to slur the members of the Rutgers women's basketball team. He circulated the clip using one of Generation We's favorite technologies—YouTube. The resulting furor led to Imus's firing by CBS and his ultimate relegation to a far less influential radio slot on a different network.<sup>1</sup>

The buying power of the Millennials is now poised to be a driving force behind the growing "green revolution."

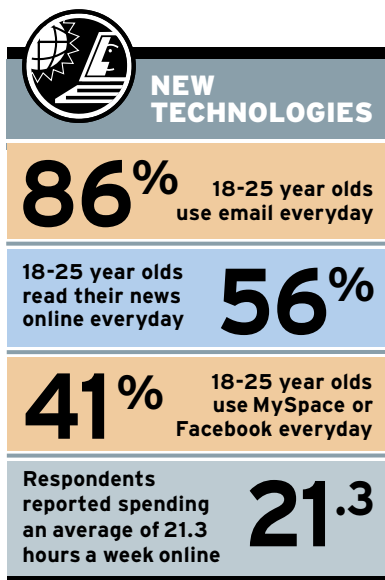
## ALWAYS CONNECTED, AND WIELDING TECHNOLOGY TO CHANGE THE WORLD

As we've discussed—and as both our survey results and our Millennial focus groups brought home in a vivid way—new technologies for generating, communicating, and sharing information have been crucial in shaping the identity of Generation We. Now they are using these new technologies to shape the world—often in ways the developers of those technologies never intended.

One of the earliest and most dramatic examples of the power of technology in the hands of Millennials has been their use of peer-to-peer file-sharing to transform the entertainment industry.

For decades, record companies had controlled the production and distribution of recorded music, charging prices that many consumers viewed as excessive and forcing them to buy the same music in multiple formats—vinyl albums, cassettes, eight-track tapes, CDs—as delivery systems evolved. The creation of the broadband-enabled Internet and peer-to-peer (P2P) file-sharing technology opened the door for an entirely new, noncentralized system for distributing music. As implemented by companies such as Napster (founded in May 1999), P2P technology lets computer users exchange files—including files of digitized music—quickly and easily via the Internet. Within months, songs by the billion were being traded cost-free through cyberspace, and CD sales began a decline that has still not halted.

The record companies struggled to respond. Some tried to launch their own systems for downloading digital music files, but these were costly, had limited offerings, and attracted few customers. Finally, in exasperation, the record industry launched a series of copyright violation lawsuits against both the P2P service providers and the music-sharers themselves, even suing teenagers who'd swapped songs with online friends. (Notably, they sued only relatively poor and powerless



SOURCE: GOR SURVEY, APRIL 2006

individuals, as if to emphasize the fact that the real purpose of the suits was intimidation.)

Although the record companies won some of their lawsuits, the industry's decline has continued. The ease and power of digital file-sharing is simply too great to be controlled through legal prohibitions. Only Steve Jobs and Apple Computer understood the sentiment of the generation and the power of the download. The emergence of the iTunes legal download store as a way to protect the industry has actually brought Apple and its proprietary iPod to the center of industry control. Apple now controls a large percentage of media content distribution and monetization because they recognized the changing forces and came up with a solution tailored to the behavior.

Perhaps the most important effects of the legal battle between record companies and music fans have been on the social and political attitudes of Generation We. As aptly stated by Morley Winograd and Michael D. Hais in their book *Millennial Makeover*:

The effect of this legal war was to create a permanent mindset on the part of the Millennial generation that entrenched special interests would stop at nothing to prevent them from sharing information on the Net that was, or at least ought to be, inherently “free.” Along the way, the struggle helped make Millennials suspicious of all elites attempting to control what they were allowed to know, whether it was the latest Indie band or the real story behind a political debate.

This dual theme—the tremendous power of the Internet to make information of every kind readily available to those who are technologically savvy, coupled with the sense of suspicion and resentment directed toward those in business and government who would control and limit the flow of that information for their own selfish objectives—is one we heard repeatedly in our Millennial focus groups. Today's young people *know* they have the power to uncover and master the truth about their world, and they are determined not to let the powers-that-be manipulate them into abandoning that power.

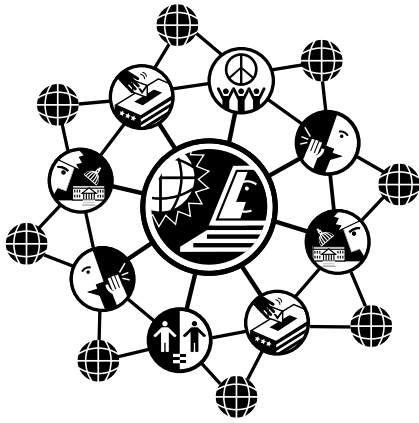
The power of file-sharing technologies to shape social and political change was illustrated in a dramatic way by an emblematic and game-changing incident in the 2006 election campaign. In August, U.S. Senator George Allen was seemingly cruising to reelection in Virginia against his Democratic challenger, former U.S. Navy Secretary Jim Webb. With his down-home style, populist credentials, and conserva-

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tive views, Allen was regarded by many as one of the front runners for the 2008 Republican presidential nomination.

All of that changed thanks to a bit of video footage captured by a volunteer for the Webb campaign. At an informal outdoor event, Allen singled out the young volunteer with the camera, an American of Indian descent named S. R. Sidarth (a member of Generation We, born in 1985). In a mocking tone, Allen called Sidarth *macaca* and sarcastically told him, “Welcome to America and the real world of Virginia.”

It was a bit of casual bigotry—stupid and mean-spirited—that in past elections would likely have caused some short-lived embarrassment for the Allen campaign. But the Webb campaign posted the video clip on YouTube. When word got around, millions of people visited the site to watch the amazing gaffe. And Allen’s blunder led to further embarrassments. Reporters investigating the origin of the strange ethnic slur “*macaca*” discovered that Allen’s mother was a Jewish immigrant from Algeria (where the term is commonly used)—a previously unknown fact about Allen’s background. Rather than responding with pride, Allen acted ashamed, denying his Jewish heritage with lame jokes about his mother serving him ham sandwiches—jokes that also wound up being circulated via YouTube.

It was a perfect storm of anti-Millennial gaffes: an ethnic insult (anathema to the ultra-tolerant Millennial generation) directed against a Millennial, and captured and distributed using the Millennials’ favorite electronic technology, streaming file-shared video. Candidate Allen paid a heavy price. Within two weeks, his support among young voters had fallen by 40 points.<sup>3</sup> In November, voter turnout reached record levels for a midterm election in Virginia, led by huge numbers in the university towns dominated by Generation We. Despite outspending his opponent nearly three to one, Allen lost to Jim Webb and saw his presidential dreams go down the drain.<sup>4</sup>

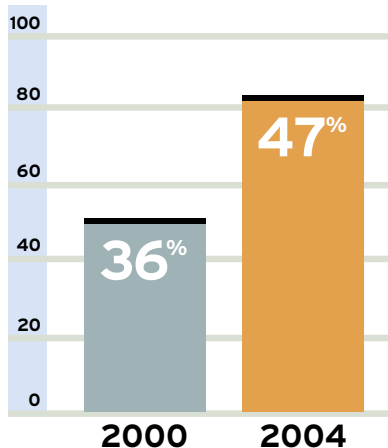
It’s not an accident that the Republican Allen was one of the most prominent victims of Millennials’ new brand of electronic politicking in 2006. The progressive orientation of Generation We is reflected in the social networking they are practicing. In 2007, when a 26-year-old Facebook member launched a web page for supporters of Barack Obama’s presidential campaign, he had more than 278,000 members signed up within months.<sup>5</sup> Relying on the Internet to reach out to small donors, Obama has set one fundraising record after another throughout the 2007–2008 campaign season.

Generation We played a key role in creating social networking, potentially the most significant social innovation driven by the Internet. According to one estimate, half of all Millennials are members of Facebook, and almost two-thirds have pages on MySpace.<sup>6</sup> Now these and other social networks are changing how products get launched, ideas get spread, and causes get traction.

**The emergence of Generation We as a powerful voting bloc supporting progressive causes and candidates isn't happening by accident or purely as a result of broad social trends. It is also being spurred by a generation of activists, mostly themselves of Millennial age, who are building political organizations to educate, empower, and mobilize young people over the long term.**

## VOTER STRENGTH

Voter turnout among 18-24 year-olds



SOURCE: CIRCLE ANALYSIS OF CENSUS CPS DATA/  
NEW POLITICS INSTITUTE 2007

Journalist Ben Adler discovered many groups on Facebook dedicated to reform of the American healthcare system. When he looked more closely, he found that these groups tilt decidedly toward the progressive side of the debate: A “perusal of Facebook groups,” he wrote, “most with hundreds or more than a thousand members, on the health-care issue shows more than 20 that advocate some form of expanded government provisioning of coverage. But only three groups that actually oppose universal health care exist, all of them with just 100 members at the time of this writing.”<sup>7</sup>

## SWINGING ELECTIONS

Generation We is voting and participating in politics far more than past youthful cohorts. As a result, they’ve already influenced three national elections. They made the 2004 presidential race far closer than it otherwise would have been, and they tipped the 2006 Congressional elections firmly into the laps of the Democrats. The national party included improved college access for all as a part of their 2006 agenda, and once they won the majority, they passed laws providing for increased Pell grants and reductions in the interest rates paid by students on educational loans.

There are a number of specific Congressional elections we can point to as having been determined by Millennial voters. For example, in Connecticut’s Second District, Democrat Joe Courtney ran on a platform that promised to make affordability of college a topic of legislative priority. Turnout at the University of Connecticut (located in the Second District) increased sharply, and Courtney unseated Republican

Rob Simmons by a margin of just over 100 votes. Courtney followed through on his promise by sponsoring a bill to help low-income students attend college.

Similarly, an analysis by the Harvard Institute of Politics concluded that two Democratic victories in the Senate—those of Jim Webb in Virginia and Jon Tester in Montana—could be attributed to increased turnout among voters age 18 to 24.<sup>8</sup>

As we write, Generation We is helping to shape the outcome of the bellwether 2008 presidential election. Shortly after the primary elections ended in June



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2008, Declare Yourself, a national nonpartisan youth voting initiative, completed its analysis of voting by young people. It found that voters age 18 to 29 turned out in record numbers in 2008, casting more than 6 million ballots in the Democratic and Republican races. Of those, about 4.9 million voted for Democrats. The youth turnout was more than *double* that of the 2000 and 2004 primaries and made up 14.5 percent of the total electorate, compared with 9.4 percent in 2004.<sup>9</sup>

Among political pros, conventional wisdom has long held that “Young people don’t vote,” which means that their positions on issues can be safely ignored. (By contrast, old people *do* vote, which helps to explain why Social Security, Medicare, and other programs tailored to help the elderly have always been treated as “*the third rail*” of politics, to be touched by politicians only at their peril.) The conventional wisdom is now being overturned. Young people—at least in their new Millennial incarnation—do indeed vote, and politicians are going to have to learn to pay attention to their concerns. It’s about time.

The emergence of Generation We as a powerful voting bloc supporting progressive causes and candidates isn’t happening by accident or purely as a result of broad social trends. It is also being spurred by a generation of activists, mostly themselves of Millennial age, who are building political organizations to educate, empower, and mobilize young people over the long term. Just as an earlier generation of activists with a very different agenda created the network of right-wing groups on campus, in local communities, in the business world, and in the media that helped to produce the conservative ascendancy of the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s, this new generation is determined to create a powerful base for progressive activism that will help shape the political landscape for decades to come.

The emergence and growth of this Millennial political infrastructure is a rapidly changing story. One good recent survey of the current scene is the book *Youth to Power* by blogger and activist Michael Connery, himself the cofounder of one of the organizations he describes (Music for America, a youth-oriented get-out-the-vote operation mobilized for the 2004 presidential election). Among the organizations Connery describes:

➤ **The Young Elected Officials Network (YEO)**, founded by 2005 by 25-year-old Andrew Gillum, the youngest elected city commissioner in the history of Tallahassee, Florida. Devoted to the needs of the 4.8 percent of elected officials who are younger than 35, YEO holds national conferences in which its members are trained in electoral politics and meet with one another on policy and program topics. YEO also provides mentoring and conducts regular teleconferences on emerging issues, helping to build a national net-

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work of young leaders interested in pursuing a Millennial agenda. The initial YEO membership of 60 has grown to 318 in 2007.<sup>10</sup>

➤ **Campus Progress**, which is working to build a progressive presence in America's colleges and universities by launching publications and providing a roster of speakers who can counter the near-ubiquity of right-

wing pundits like Michelle Malkin and Ann Coulter. Founded not by a Millennial but by Gen Xer David Halperin (a former Clinton staffer now in his mid-forties), Campus Progress supports 47 campus magazines and newspapers, maintains its own online magazine which draws more than 200,000 visitors per month, and has helped to organize campaigns involving numerous on- and off-campus organizations around issues such as global warming, student debt, and the war in Iraq.<sup>11</sup>

➤ **The Roosevelt Institute**, one of a handful of fledgling progressive think-tanks organized by Millennials as a direct response to such massive and powerful right-ring think tanks as the Hoover and Cato Institutes and the Heritage Foundation. Founded in 2004 by Kai Stinchombe, then a 22-year-old doctoral student in political science at Stanford University, the Roosevelt Institute now has over 7,000 members at 60 universities, who conduct research and hold conferences on topics ranging from health care reform to the living wage.<sup>12</sup>

The millions of progressives in Generation We have quite a way to go before they can equal the institutional, financial, and electoral clout the conservative movement has amassed over the past 40 years. But the demographics are on their side—and so is time. Today, the progressive resurgence spearheaded by Generation We is of similar proportion to the progressive swing in 1932, when Roosevelt was ushered into power for four terms and implemented the New Deal. We may be in a place that is roughly comparable to that occupied by the conservatives in the late 1960s and early 1970s—witnessing the massive failure and crack-up of the opposition and just beginning to mobilize the positive response that will ultimately sweep the nation.

## AN EMERGING GENERATION OF LEADERS

If you're a Baby Boomer, you may have noticed that one kind of social activism your generation was famous for back in the day has gone



practically unmentioned in this chapter about the emergence of the Millennials—political protest in the form of marches, demonstrations, sit-ins, rallies, and acts of civil disobedience. Maybe you’re wondering—when can we expect to see Generation We taking over the streets of America’s great cities as a way of promoting change?

It may or may not happen. We live in a new era where new forms of activism are likely to take center stage. The coming wave of change may have a shape that is quite unfamiliar to older veterans of the civil rights marches, antiwar rallies, teach-ins, and campus protests of the 1960s and 1970s.

It would be false to imply that today’s youth has completely abandoned traditional street protests and similar kinds of demonstrations. Beginning in 1999, demonstrations against economic globalization have been widespread around the time of significant meetings of groups like the World Trade Organization and the Group of Eight. During the run-up to the Iraq war, protest marches were held in cities around the world, reaching a peak when millions of demonstrators marched against the war on 15 February 2003.<sup>13</sup> However, it’s true that demonstrations such as these have drawn less media coverage than similar events in the convulsive years of 1968 and 1969, and partly as a result of the diminished press attention, political activists have looked toward other methods of organizing and mobilizing around their demands for change.

As we’ll discuss later in this book, marches, demonstrations, and other forms of “visible activism” can have an impact unmatched by other political activities and therefore should play a role in the coming Millennial-led revolution. But as you’re about to discover, taking to the streets isn’t the only or even the dominant form of political action in which the Millennials engage.

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## MILLENNIAL CHANGEMAKERS

The fact is that Generation We is already pioneering new forms of social, economic, and political activism. In the next few pages, we’ll briefly profile some of the young leaders who are at the forefront of this movement. Some might be called “liberal,” others “conservative,” but when we look more closely we see that, in different ways, they all represent the new vision America needs. And they all symbolize the rising activism, energy, creativity, and power of America’s Millennials—a group that is coming of age and ready to begin sharing the reins of power. Most important, *they know it*.

**Against all odds, the students fended off a proposed 100-million-dollar increase in student fees and obtained a 15-million-dollar bond for low-income student housing.**

## Using Film to Spur International Activism

Filmmakers Jason Russell, Bobby Bailey, and Laren Poole hail from San Diego. All Millennials, they made a film called *Invisible Children* dealing with the plight of the people of northern Uganda caught in the midst of a civil war in which thousands of children have been kidnaped and forced to become soldiers. They followed up by creating an organization called Invisible Children, Inc., which holds showings of the film at various educational and cultural centers—mostly high schools and colleges—to raise public awareness in the United States in an attempt to spur youth into action and to change the current policies of both the American and Ugandan governments. On April 28, 2006, 80,000 young people—almost all Millennials—attended peaceful overnight protests to call attention to the Invisible Children cause and to raise money for schools and refugee camps in northern Uganda.<sup>14</sup>

## A Social Entrepreneur Making Homes Affordable

Bo Menkiti is a real estate mogul with a twist: He is a Millennial based in a rundown neighborhood of Washington, D.C., whose focus is on developing residential properties for low-income home buyers. A cum laude graduate of Harvard Business School, Menkiti founded the Menkiti Group in 2004 to renovate and convert abandoned or neglected buildings into homes and condos for teachers, firefighters, and other first-time real estate buyers. To change the incentives that normally push real estate agents to promote high-end properties rather than affordable homes, Menkiti pays members of his sales team a fixed salary and a commission based on number of homes sold rather than property value. “Housing is a fundamental social good,” Menkiti explains, and he says that his agency strives to operate as a for-profit business driven by social objectives.<sup>15</sup>

## Collaborating to Create the Automobile of Tomorrow

One of our world’s most urgent technological needs is for the next generation of fuel-efficient, ecologically friendly automobiles—a new vision of the motor vehicle that will enable the emerging middle-class millions of China and India to get their own wheels without ravaging our already weakened environment. Rather than waiting for General Motors or Toyota to invent this technology, a group of engineering students at M.I.T. decided to tackle the challenge themselves.

Collaborating with their peers at 35 other universities, students Anna S. Jaffe, Robyn Allen, and the other members of the Vehicle Design Summit (VDS) are at work designing a high-performance four-passenger car that will get 200 miles to the gallon and minimize cradle-to-grave costs for materials, shipping, and waste disposal as



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well as energy. Perhaps most remarkably, the VDS team has taken a leaf from the Open Source software movement, not merely in its use of Internet-based long-distance collaborative tools but also in its approach to intellectual property rights: All the members of the VDS team are committed to making their inventions freely available to anyone who wants to use them.<sup>16</sup>

### Mobilizing Generation We to Shake Up Politics

In 2002, David Smith was the 21-year-old chief of staff of the External Affairs Office of the student government at UC Berkeley. When word got around that the university budget was threatened by the state government's financial woes, Smith organized 150 of his fellow students to travel to the state capital in Sacramento to protect their interests. Against all odds, the students fended off a proposed 100-million-dollar increase in student fees and obtained a 15-million-dollar bond for low-income student housing.

*“What old people say you cannot do, you try and find that you can. Old deeds for old people, and new deeds for new.”*

HENRY DAVID THOREAU

The experience inspired Smith to devote his life to mobilizing Generation We to exercise their political clout. Today he helps run the Democracy 2.0 campaign, a grassroots effort to promote deliberative democracy—a process whereby ordinary citizens gather to study issues, voice their concerns, and develop solutions to our society’s most pressing problems. He has also founded Mobilize.org, an “all-partisan” network dedicated to education and empowering young people through its 100 member organizations, 2 million youth advocates, and 75 Mobilizer teams working on college and high school campuses to organize young people around local community issues.<sup>17</sup>

### Reaching Across Borders to End Sex Exploitation

Founded in 1995 by Canadian-born Millennial Craig Kielburger (then just 13 years old), Free The Children is the world’s largest network of children helping children through education. The organization boasts more than 1 million youth in 45 countries involved in innovative education and development programs, ranging from rescuing Asian teenagers from the sex trade, setting up job cooperatives so parents of Latin American kids won’t have to send their children to work, and creating rescue homes for child camel jockeys in the Middle East.

Free The Children has received the World’s Children’s Prize for the Rights of the Child (also known as the Children’s Nobel Prize), the Human Rights Award from the World Association of Non-Governmental Organizations, and has formed successful partnerships with leading school boards and Oprah’s Angel Network.<sup>18</sup>

### Challenging Charities to Demonstrate Their Effectiveness

Holden Karnofsky and Elie Hassenfeld started their careers at Bridgewater Associates, a financial management firm where their job was to analyze the performance of companies as possible investment opportunities. In 2006, when both were 25, they decided to apply some of the same expertise to nonprofit organizations. Which were achieving real results? Which showed the greatest bang for the buck? Which used their resources most effectively to save or transform lives?

Today Karnofsky and Hassenfeld have abandoned their high-priced financial careers to run GiveWell, a research firm that studies charities and ranks their effectiveness. It’s sponsored by the Clear Fund, a philanthropic organization the pair also founded, which makes grants to the charities that GiveWell deems most powerful. If Karnofsky and Hassenfeld get their way, charities in the future will routinely be challenged to *prove* their ability to use donations wisely to improve society—not just to assert it.<sup>19</sup>

## Forcing a Social Networking Site to Change Its Policies

Many commentators have pointed to the popularity of social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook as potential forums for organizing young people in support of political and social causes. As we've noted, progressive activists, including supporters of Barack Obama's presidential campaign, have used the sites to galvanize interest in their causes. Yet the sites themselves are controlled by corporations and run for profit, not for the benefit of their users.

Now some Millennials are trying to change this dynamic. In the fall of 2006, when Facebook unrolled a new feature called "News Feed," which allowed members to track activities of their friends online, Ben Parr, a student at Northwestern, launched a movement to protest the violation of privacy rights. Within days, 700,000 young people had signed on to Parr's protest, and the company was forced to back down.

A year later, when Facebook created "Beacon," a so-called social-advertising program that used member activities to promote products, MoveOn.org created a Facebook group to push back. The MoveOn protestors got Facebook to make Beacon an opt-in rather than an opt-out feature and even convinced some advertisers to steer clear of the program altogether.<sup>20</sup>

## Saving AIDS Orphans from Lives of Hopelessness

When Andrew Klaber spent the summer after his sophomore year in college visiting Thailand, he was appalled to see children forced into prostitution after losing their parents to the AIDS epidemic. Determined to make a difference, Klaber—now a 26-year-old student at Harvard Business School—founded Orphans Against AIDS, which pays school expenses for hundreds of parentless kids in Asia and Africa. Klaber and his friends donate their time to running the organization and pay all administrative expenses out of their own pockets, so every dollar donated goes directly to help the children.<sup>21</sup>

These stories and numerous others we could cite all demonstrate the same point—many members of Generation We already beginning to change our world for the better. All they need now is the support of other generations and an overarching plan behind which we can unite.