

**Successor Generation**  
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*The "successor generation" I have in mind is not that of the so-called "baby boomers" but the generation still in search of itself, the generation labeled "X" What is the state of the philanthropic tradition that we will pass on to them, and what will they make of it?*

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An organization known as the Atlantic Council launched a "successor generation project" about twenty years ago. The issue was the future of American foreign policy as it's passed from the hands of those who had created the great postwar alliance called NATO to a generation that had not lived through the rise of Hitler and the incredible destruction of World War II. The generation that prosecuted that war also tried to atone for what it had done by rebuilding Europe under the Marshall Plan and American society through the GI Bill.

The Atlantic Council project began before the collapse of the Soviet empire, the destruction of the Berlin Wall, and the end of the Cold War. The project assumed that the unifying military tasks of NATO would continue indefinitely. The military rationale that brought NATO into being assumed a unifying political rationale that would hold western democracy together.

Prior to World War II totalitarian dictatorship was what William James would have called a "live option" - an issue of importance we cannot avoid. Totalitarianism was rejected; democracy became the norm for the world. Milosevic and his like are throwbacks in more ways than one. Communism became for most of the world a live option with the rise of the Soviet empire. After its fall, modern capitalism became a live option. Democratic capitalism is claimed by some to be the end of history; humanity will never have a better alternative, there are no other live options.

To speak of "successor generations," then, means to speak of those who choose among the live options of an era. There is a continuing struggle *within* as well as *between* generations to determine which options are live and which choices will be made about them. Generations are defined by the defining choices they make. There is a World War II generation and by contrast there is a Vietnam generation, one generation defined by its courageous willingness to prosecute a war against totalitarianism and the other by its courageous opposition to what it considered a phony war. Those who defined American society yielded their dominance to a new generation when the civil rights movement moved from voluntary action to the law of the land. The very meaning of "democracy" was changed by "voluntary action for the public good."

The generation defined by World War II and its aftermath passed on its worldview of democracy but it was the successor generation of the baby boomers that gave the world modern global capitalism. The struggle between socialism and capitalism that began in the 19th century and continued through the 20th seems to have concluded with a resounding victory for what is best called "democratic capitalism."

There was a period not too long ago when it appeared that the philanthropic tradition might fade away. Fade away it did for most of the generation of western Europe following World War II. The welfare state supplanted private charity; most of the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable were to be guaranteed by the state as rights of citizenship.

Twenty years ago I took part in a symposium at the Wilson Center in Washington where a panel of us discussed the question, *Is philanthropy necessary in a just society?* There was a vision of modern justice that could at least imagine a world in which voluntary interventions in the lives of others for their benefit would disappear because Beveridge's five giant evils- want, disease, ignorance, squalor and idleness- would no longer plague humanity.

The first successors to the generation of World War II introduced a conception of the world in which philanthropy wasn't necessary. The second phase

of that successor generation tried socialism and social democracy and failed to pass it on, largely because they couldn't make it work.

This is thus far an exercise in "mythistory": it is partly about the facts of history and partly about the stories we tell about those facts. We may disagree about both. When we happen to agree we put a label on the agreement, we name generations and eras and defining issues.

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These remarks have assumed that I am speaking to an audience roughly between the age of forty or so and - well, let us say, significantly older than that. Most of you are still in the thick of the action, probably with considerable energy and influence on the live options of the day. Some of you may have handed over responsibility for the course of events to what you think of as a younger generation. My son is beginning to have more influence than his father, and rightly so.

My concern is for those who aren't here: those I refer to as "my young people," the people I teach. My young people are more precisely first-year graduate students just out of college age 22 or 23.

I shouldn't use the expression *my* young people because the young people I care most about, the ones whom I most want to succeed to define their generation, are liberally educated - that is, they bear the true mark of the free person in that they have a mind of their own. Not my mind and not yours: *theirs*. What they think will become less and less what you and I and others may have tried to teach them and more and more what they take from us and leave behind and what they come to think and believe that is their own.

A successor generation worth its salt will define itself by its values and its choices about the live options of its time. We can make suggestions and they can - politely, I hope, and with some tolerant affection - accept or reject them.

The philanthropic issue that most interests me is not what Bill Gates does with his money and ideas but what my students do with *their* money and *their* ideas. For one thing, my students make it very clear to me that they think Mr.

Gates has *far too much* money. They are concerned that the gap between rich and poor is already much too great and they are alarmed that it is growing. They are worried about the condition of the environment - but less than their parents were for a while - but they are more worried about persistent poverty and homelessness and the oppression of minorities.

The inherent bias in my sense of "young people" results from teaching young people attracted to the values of service and citizenship and community and justice. They are not like the other claimants to define their generation, those whom the media seem most interested in. The young people I teach bring philanthropic values they have gleaned from the mixed traditions we have tried to pass on to them.

I think my students are still a bit naive; they put too much emphasis on distribution of wealth and not enough on creating wealth. They don't intend to wander off to the hills of Vermont and escape society, however, as some of their parents' generation did in protest against Vietnam and materialism and American capitalism. They intend to change the society, as those of the generation symbolized by the names of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King. They are able to be lifted up by those voices of the past and they will respond to those voices when they are heard again.

They will *act*, however, in a more recent expression of public service and citizenship that is almost never accorded the same status: the "points of light" of President Bush. The vision of the points of light assumes that there are heroes all around us engaged in ordinary acts of service to others and to building and rebuilding community. That is in fact what my students are all about; they are much more modest about putting themselves forward as the successors to John F. Kennedy or Martin Luther King. They follow John Kennedy and Martin Luther King in theory, so to speak, but they follow Jimmy Carter and George Bush in practice. (American President has put a clearer personal stamp on voluntary service than Jimmy Carter.)

Another initiative worth mentioning is an effort to bridge the social visions of the Presidents, namely America's Promise headed by General Colin Powell. The

bipartisan nature of the initiative is notable in itself; that the focus is on helping children and young people is perhaps even more praiseworthy.

My students are modest in their expression of their personal ambition but convinced that the problems of their time can be resolved. The young people I teach have most of the right values, some of the right skills (in information technology, for example), and much of the right resolve. They compare favorably to the best and the brightest of their parents' and of their grandparents' generation. They are themselves a minority in terms of influence but they are the ones I want to stake the future on.

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What does that future look like? What is the state of the philanthropic tradition we are passing on to them?

I must point out that I see an American society of three sectors: a first sector government; a second sector of the private economic marketplace; and a third sector of voluntary action for the public good. The third sector is where we propose the live social and cultural options and moral choices of our time. The third sector is the ground out of which emerged all the great social movements of the past century: civil and human rights, conservation and environment, public health and education, the role of women, the scope of the arts in public life. It is the often chaotic arena in which we hammer out our values and beliefs about abortion and assisted suicide, evolution and creation science, sexual preference, censorship, and the like. The world of "philanthropy" includes all those things and more.

Most people reduce philanthropy to money: gifts of money, on the one hand, or fund raising, on the other. On that basis, philanthropy is doing very well. Americans are giving and raising more money than ever. According to all the available measures, we should be: we are richer than Croesus ever dreamt. Or at least some of us are.

We enter the new millennium with a dominant live option: the choices wealthy people will make about the disposition of their wealth. More precisely, the choices the wealthy will make about their *surplus* income and assets.

It has been more than a decade since I first saw speculation about the great transfer of wealth from this generation to the next. Some of the largest fortunes are so new we find ourselves speaking awkwardly about people who won't face ultimate decisions until 2040 or 2050 or even later. If longevity continues to stretch out, one can only guess at the magnitude of personal fortunes and what "deferred giving" will have come to imply.

Prudence suggests to me that we should project a middle course between continued domestic economic growth of the past decade and a depression of the kind I grew up with. I will withhold my comments on the global economy until after 31 December and the possible disasters of Y2K. That in turn suggests a very large amount of disposable money for philanthropic purposes.

*Money will not be the problem.*

Even without a major Y2K catastrophe, the poorest countries of the world - which include some of the largest countries of the world - face poverty and hunger of unacceptable scale and severity. Those countries are also most seriously menaced by AIDS.

The successor generation will not be able to solve those problems through philanthropy, either through their giving or their service. In my opinion, the great problems of humanity require public rather than private answers. Ideally, they call for the effective interaction of all three sectors, with philanthropy providing vision and guidance and monitoring of results.

I have lived long enough to believe that democratic capitalism will survive only if its capitalism is constrained - ideally self-constrained - and its democracy free and open. Those ideals were manifest in the work of Andrew Carnegie and have been given new meaning in the philanthropy of George Soros. Someone in the successor generation will have to follow in their footsteps. The myth of the free public library and the individual search for knowledge, in Carnegie's gift to us; the myth of the open society nourishing its grassroots organizations in George Soros' gift not only to Eastern Europe but to the world.

I would add the myth of microlending associated with the name of Muhamad Yunus, reconnecting private philanthropy with small business, in the

tradition of Maimonides who said almost 800 years ago that the highest form of charity is to take someone into your business or make a loan to help someone get on their own feet.

The myth of Mother Teresa, the implacable determination to bring compassion to least among us, even in their moment of death, reminds us of the tradition of charity in its purest and most ancient form.

The human bearers of such myths will be needed - I almost said "among us" - among the generations which follow us. Among our grandchildren and great-grandchildren and beyond.

I foresee no society in which philanthropy is no longer needed, no human condition in which things no longer go wrong or in which things could no longer get better, no human nature that lacks the capacity to respond to others in need.

The agenda continues to change, new live options remain to be faced, but the future is worth looking forward to. Those of us in this room will make our best contribution to that future if we are very honest with ourselves about the values we most want to live on. That means we have to confront our past, being modest about our successes and honest about our failures.

If we have done our educational job right, the young people of the next generations will have a chance to live by their own lights, their own values - to have a mind of their own, the most precious ideal we could give them.