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**GRAND
ALLIANCE**



➤ A Turning Point for America

As we've mentioned, Generation We is already the largest generation in U.S. history. *By 2016, American Millennials—including young people who immigrate to this country from overseas—will be 100 million strong. Age 16 to 38, they will also be in the prime of young adulthood—graduating from colleges, universities, and graduate schools; starting families; launching careers; founding businesses and not-for-profit organizations; and in some cases, beginning careers in politics and public service. By 2016, there may even be a handful of older Millennials serving as U.S. senators, members of Congress, and state governors, and beginning to be mentioned as possible future presidents.*

Generation We, it's clear, will be poised to take control of the United States and thereby play a major role in determining the future of humankind on this planet. For the reasons we've explained throughout this book, we're excited about the prospect. We're looking forward to the Millennials helping to make America a better place and reversing many of the dire trends that have harmed our country and our world in recent years.

“Change does not roll in on the wheels of inevitability, but comes through continuous struggle. And so we must straighten our backs and work for our freedom. A man can’t ride you unless your back is bent.”

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

When a nation faces its greatest challenges, generations must work together for the common and greater good.

But no single generation, no matter how numerous and gifted, can change a nation or the world on its own. Even at the height of their power and influence (which will probably arrive during the decade 2025–2035, when members of Generation We will be in their forties and fifties), the Millennials will never be an absolute majority of the population or of the electorate. To achieve their full potential, they will need help and support from others, including both those who are older and younger than they are.

This is the same pattern we can see in the life cycle of every notable generation in history. The so-called Greatest Generation, which was born between 1901 and 1924 and successfully tackled the twin challenges of the Great Depression and World War II, is a vivid example. They achieved an enormous amount as young workers for the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Works Progress Administration; as the GIs who liberated Europe from the Nazis and the female factory workers who supplied the Allied war machine; and as the entrepreneurs, corporate employees, and family men and women who helped jumpstart the economic boom of the 1950s. Eventually, a few of their number went on to guide the nation personally in the form of leaders such as John F. Kennedy (born in 1917), Lyndon Johnson (1908), and Ronald Reagan (1911).

But the Greatest Generation didn’t do any of these things completely on their own. They were inspired by the leadership of people from earlier generations, including Franklin D. Roosevelt (born in 1882), George C. Marshall (1880), Winston Churchill (1874), and Dwight D. Eisenhower (1890). Of course, these great wartime figures could never have defeated the Axis powers without the sacrifices of millions of Greatest Generation soldiers; but neither could those armies have prevailed without the wisdom of Roosevelt, Marshall, Churchill, Eisenhower, and others.

When a nation faces its greatest challenges, generations must work together for the common and greater good.

And so it will be with Generation We. The 2008 election cycle marks their coming of age, as the oldest members of their age group turn 30. It’s a moment in time that is almost exactly the equivalent of 1932, the election year when the oldest members of the Greatest Generation turned 31. That election, occurring in the depths of the Great Depression, proved to be a major watershed in American history.

Repulsed by the clear failure of laissez-faire Republican conservatism, Americans by the millions turned to Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Democrats—led by the young voters of what would become the Greatest Generation. FDR’s victory ushered in 40 years of political dominance for Democratic liberalism and the greatest period of benevolent American influence in history, including the defeat of fascism;

the founding, under U.S. guidance, of a series of great international institutions (the UN, NATO, SEATO) that successfully averted any further global war; the rebuilding of the defeated Axis powers as peace-loving democracies; and the biggest economic boom in world history.

There is another striking coincidence: Generation We today is trending approximately 60 percent Democratic to 38 percent Republican, which is the highest generational difference in voting tendency *since* 1932.

It's impossible to predict with certainty how history will judge the events of today. But someday the election of 2008 may be viewed as a turning point comparable to 1932 in the American saga. If so, it may well be seen as a moment when Generation We took the stage, and with help from millions of older Americans, gave the wheel of history a decisive turn.

If this happens, it will be because of a grand alliance between Generation We and like-minded Americans from other generations. In that alliance, several specific groups are likely to play important roles.

THE LEGACY BEARERS

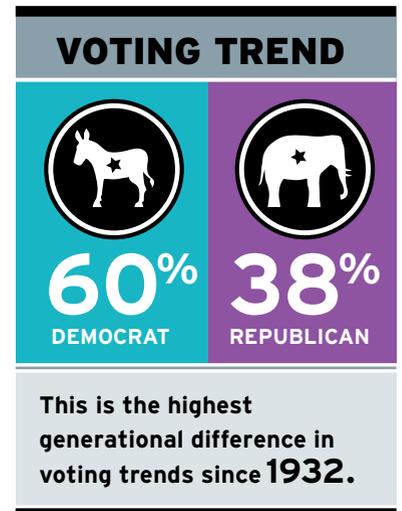
Legacy-bearing Baby Boomers and prior generations are seeking to redeem the failed hopes and dreams of their youth by helping younger generations to reshape America along the lines of their most idealistic imaginings.

“Grandparent” is a role you grow into, and it’s the stage in life millions of Baby Boomers have already entered or are now entering. Ideally, it should be the culmination of a life well lived—a time of serenity in which to enjoy the fruits of your hard work, to enjoy the spectacle of younger generations taking over their inheritance, and to pass along the wisdom you’ve developed through a lifetime of challenging and rewarding adventures. It’s also a time when the deeper meaning of life begins to emerge, and maturity and perspective start to blunt the dogmatism of youth.

Unfortunately, for many of the women and men now moving into this stage of life, the serenity and the sense of fulfillment they rightfully seek are proving elusive.

Part of the reason is selfish—the fear many of these elders feel when they contemplate their own futures. Will their personal safety nets hold? Will Social Security and Medicare remain intact? Will the corporate pensions and IRAs and 401(k)s they built up over time retain their value? Will they be able to enjoy the retirements they planned—or will they have to go back to work, or live a hand-to-mouth existence, unable even to pay for healthcare and medicines, let alone the amenities of a rich, rewarding life?

And part of the reason is selfless—the concern many elders have about the kind of world they are passing along to the younger





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generations. Will today's elders be the first American generation to give their children and grandchildren a less secure, less hopeful world than the one they received from their parents? Will their offspring be doomed to a lower quality of life than their parents enjoyed—a life of cramped horizons, diminishing prospects, increasing helplessness, and expanding anxiety? Has the Baby Boom generation failed not only to match the achievement of its own ancestral elders, the legendary Greatest Generation, but failed even to live up to the minimal mandate of every cohort—to leave the young a world they can call their own?

Today's legacy-bearers grew up with enormous expectations. Raised in the post-war world by often-indulgent parents, given unprecedented access to education, technology, and the riches of the world, the children of the 1950s and 1960s were considered golden, a generation of superstars with the potential to reshape society for the better.

Much of what they did with their opportunity was admirable. The Boomers have made America a more affluent place. They have created an amazing array of new technologies and helped introduce the world to the marvelous freedoms of contemporary life. They also have made America a more open, tolerant society, having taken long strides toward creating real equality for both sexes and for people of all religions, races, ethnic backgrounds, and sexual orientations.

But the vision on which they were raised—of a world without poverty, disease, inequality, war, bigotry, crime, or hatred—has long since faded from sight. It's hard not to feel a sense of disappointment, even bitterness, when we compare the brilliant promise of the Baby Boom generation with the troubled legacy they would leave behind if their story ended today.

Fortunately, their story doesn't end today. There is at least one more chapter yet to be written. And it is one they will write in collaboration with the generations they spawned—the generations of their children and grandchildren, including the members of Generation We who are now poised to take center stage.

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THE CARING MOTHERS AND FATHERS

Caring mothers and fathers are determined not to become the first generation of Americans to bequeath their children a poorer, sicker, weaker, and more dangerous world, and who will work with youth to prevent that.

Unfortunately, at this moment, the relationship between Generation We and the older generations in American society is a dysfunctional one. On an individual basis, there are many healthy, nurturing parent-child relationships (and it's noteworthy that Millennials report more positive, loving connections with their own elders than other recent American generations). But on a societal basis, the relationship is more like that between an abusive parent and a victimized child.

Does this seem extreme? Think about it. Right now, the parental generation that is running the United States has created—or tolerated—the following:

- A nation in which massive debt has been created for the benefit of a relative handful of older people (mainly business oligarchs) and which young people of every class will have to pay off for decades to come
- A nation in which opportunities for decent work, housing, education, healthcare, and good nutrition are becoming more and more scarce and expensive
- A nation in which the news and entertainment media are dominated by fear-mongering, mind-numbing trivia, and soul-sapping consumerism
- A nation in which natural environment and resources are being squandered for short-term gain, leaving behind a world in which the young will have to scramble even to survive

Isn't this relationship fairly described as an abusive one?

Today, many mothers and fathers are welcoming home caskets, and children without limbs. Most were too young to participate in Vietnam, so they are now experiencing for the first time the indignation of paying personally for oil wars and imperialistic foreign policy. When politicians call this a war for a lifetime or 100 years in Iraq, they shudder—especially given that their precious grandkids could be sent off and brought home in the same way. They do not want their children to be fodder for military conquest. They want to keep their families intact.



We don't believe most mothers and fathers want to bequeath a world of insecurity and violence to their children, nor was it ever their intention to create such a world in the first place. The parents themselves are victims alongside their children, trapped in patterns of behavior that have been imposed upon them by deceptive and (in some cases) near-psychotic leaders. Now is the time to reverse these deadly trends and to break out of the mutually destructive habits that have created the patterns of abuse.

THE CULTURAL CREATIVES

Cultural creatives are Americans who have already moved beyond old divisions of “traditionalist” versus “modernist” to embrace new forms of spirituality, social experimentation, and personal growth. These are the people who are ready to respond to the new vision of the Millennials. It's a term originally coined by sociologist Paul H. Ray and psychologist Sherry Ruth Anderson to describe a large segment in Western society that has recently developed beyond the standard paradigm of “modernists” versus “traditionalists” or “conservatives.” The concept was first presented in 2000 in their book *The Cultural Creatives: How 50 Million People Are Changing the World*.¹ Since then it has been elaborated in other writings by Ray, Anderson, and other analysts. Ray also sometimes refers to this segment of the population as the New Progressives.

This growing section of the population—estimated by Ray at 26 to 28 percent of the population, or around 50 million Americans—is spiritual in orientation and embraces the practice of spiritual values in daily life, even without practicing any formal religion.

Many cultural creatives are familiar with a variety of religions and seek to identify with principles that are universal among religions. The intention is to search for universal, practical spiritual principles that have intrinsic value and do not depend on ecclesiastical authority.

The cultural creatives generally avoid identification with the traditional “left” and “right” of the political spectrum, although they are “progressive” or “liberal” in their disdain for corporate power. Instead, they are known for their support for diversity along ethnic, gender, religious, and sexual lines; their commitment to civil rights and civil liberties; their concern for the environment; and their opposition to militarism.

The cultural creatives are natural allies for the emerging Generation We. Paul Ray has long been pointing to the growing anxiety that this group of Americans has about the future of our planet. In his essay “The New Political Compass,” in which he describes the cultural creatives as occupying the northern point on a four-point political map, Ray writes:

We don't believe most mothers and fathers want to bequeath a world of insecurity and violence to their children, nor was it ever their intention to create such a world in the first place.

What most upsets the people of the North part of the Compass is that politicians are not dealing with the issues that affect their children's future. Historically, these have been seen as women's concerns. No longer. My 1999 survey showed that a full 60 percent of all Americans, and it now appears, 80 percent of Political North, are very worried that their own children and grandchildren will inherit a worse world than they themselves grew up in.

The fears of cultural creatives concerning the future of their children are becoming all too real.

This is a complete flip from Americans' historical optimism. It is a deep anxiety, but it has no present focus. Though it is important, it is easily pre-empted by whatever is more urgent. In that respect, it's rather like buying life insurance, indefinitely postponable until some crisis comes along to remind us how risky life really is, and how transitory. It is easily arguable that our inept and corrupt politics is about to harm us. The West is about to face a cascade of crisis that political business as usual cannot handle, whether it is led from the right or the left. Our most recent big crisis, 9/11/2001, has already brought that latent pessimism about the future to the surface.²

We think Ray was prescient. From today's perspective, the crises of the West have become all too clear—not just the terror attacks of 9/11 and the inept response to them by the U.S. government, but also the war in Iraq, the onrushing climate crisis, the increasing gulf between rich and poor (both nationally and globally), the continued erosion of civil liberties, the looming risk of economic meltdown, and the danger of worldwide pandemics.

The fears of cultural creatives concerning the future of their children are becoming all too real. Now that a vast cohort of those “children”—Generation We—is reaching the age at which they can begin to mobilize themselves in response to these crises, there's every reason to believe that Ray's “new progressives” will be eager to line up behind them in support of the causes and leaders they embrace.

THE JUSTICE SEEKERS

There's a final large group of Americans who we think will play an important role in the grand alliance that will support the Millennials in their quest to redeem our national promise. These are the justice seekers—fair-minded citizens who are troubled by the large and growing gap between our stated ideals of democracy, freedom, and opportunity and the harsh reality of life in twenty-first century America.

Earlier in these pages, we've discussed how growing income in-

equality, dwindling educational opportunity, lack of access to health-care, and the increasing concentration of power in the hands of elites are all helping to undermine the traditional American values of fairness and equality. Millions of Americans are disturbed by these trends, and many are prepared to demand redress for these injustices.

Here are examples of some of the events and trends that have aroused the feelings of the justice seekers and that will mobilize them to support a movement for social and political change:

- The horrific aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, in which government indifference and incompetence combined with poverty and racism created a nightmare in which a great American city was nearly destroyed by a natural disaster whose worst effects could have been and should have been foreseen and forestalled.
- Corporate scandals, such as those involving Enron, WorldCom/MCI, Tyco, and Global Crossing, in which white-collar criminals lavishly and fraudulently enriched themselves and their cronies at the expense of customers, investors, and lower-level employees.
- The failure of our military to adequately equip, train, protect, and reward our men and women in uniform, even as we sent them into the line of fire in Iraq and Afghanistan for repeated tours of duty, and squandered billions in unaccounted funds paid to private contractors and Iraqi politicians.
- The transformation of our prisons into a vast system for social control, in which more than 2.3 million Americans—more than one in every hundred adults—are incarcerated, many of them charged with nonviolent offenses, such as drug abuse, for which therapeutic and remedial care would be far more effective and humane. Racial disparities are enormous: If you're a Hispanic male, your chance of being in prison is 2.2 times greater than of a white male, and if you're a Black male, your chance is almost 6 times as great.³
- The increasing difficulties faced by young people who try to better their lot through higher education, caught between ever-growing tuition costs, ever-shrinking access to government grants and low-cost student loans, ever-increasing mountains of debt, and ever-worsening job prospects.

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Notice that none of these is a partisan issue. You don't have to be a Democrat or a Republican to be outraged over the destruction of the Ninth Ward of New Orleans, the obscene money-grubbing by the energy-market manipulators at Enron or those who drove the price of oil to 140 dollars per barrel, or the disgraceful conditions in which wounded veterans are treated at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. All you need is a sense of fair play and a commitment to the idea that America should be better than this.

Millions of Americans who have that sense and that commitment are ready to become part of the grand alliance that will usher in a new progressive era in our national politics.

IT'S NOT "US AGAINST THEM"

The revolution led by Generation We will *not* be about intergenerational conflict. Some have suggested that conflicts over the national debt, troubled entitlement programs for the elderly, and weakened support for programs in education and health must inevitably pit aging Baby Boomers against burdened Millennials (with Gen Xers caught somewhere in the middle). But the solutions to these and other major social, political, and economic problems can't be achieved by any one group, and that means warfare among groups will only make matters worse.

Thankfully, there is every sign that the real-world members of Generation We have no interest in fomenting resentment, scapegoating, or intergenerational battles. Every survey and attitudinal study—including our own—confirms that today's young people respect and are eager to learn from well-intentioned people of their parents' and grandparents' generations. This is a dramatic change from the experience of many people from past generations, who grew up believing that intense intergenerational conflict is natural and unavoidable. In their massive study *Millennials Rising*, generational scholars Neil Howe and William Strauss report, "Most teens say they identify with their parents' values, and over nine in ten say they 'trust' and 'feel close to' their parents. The proportion who report conflict with their parents is declining."

Although Baby Boomers may have invented the motto, "Don't trust anyone over 30"—and even lived by it, at least until they themselves turned 30—their children, Generation We, are ready to trust and work with them.⁴

The Millennial revolution will also not be about moral judgments, a religious revival, or a return to "traditional lifestyles." We've already noted the fact that Generation We is more tolerant, open-minded, and

accepting than any previous generation in American history. They see those far-right dogmatists espousing “traditional” rhetoric today as a cog in the machine that created the mess they are in. When it comes to lifestyle choices—whether we’re talking about sexual orientation, abortion, divorce, or gay marriage, or about gambling, drinking, drug use, and church attendance—their all-but-explicit motto is “Live and let live.”

It’s not that Millennials don’t have preferences or beliefs about the right and wrong ways to live. Survey results, statistics about behavior choices, and mounds of anecdotal evidence all show that Millennials believe in responsible lifestyles, strong relationships, and the values of family and community. But they *don’t* believe that anyone has the right to force their opinions on anyone else, and they generally look askance on people who judge or condemn others for the lifestyle choices they make. As long as you aren’t harming others (neglecting your children, for example), you have the right to decide for yourself how you want to live. And the members of Generation We respect that right.

This tolerant attitude is one reason for the growing rift between most Millennials and organized religion. Having grown up in a world where religious dialogue is dominated by headlines about evangelical preachers threatening nonbelievers with fire and brimstone, about blaming 9/11 on homosexuality, and about Islamic fundamentalists employing terrorism against “*infidels*” who don’t share their exact beliefs, Millennials have come to associate piety with hateful, us-against-them attitudes.

Many studies of Generation We bear out these findings. For example, according to surveys by the Barna Group, which examines the religious attitudes of young people, 87 percent of Americans between the ages of 16 and 29 describe mainstream Christianity as “judgmental,” 85 percent call it “hypocritical,” 78 percent say it’s “old-fashioned,” and 70 percent call it “insensitive to others.”

Obviously these findings pose a challenge for religious leaders—including progressives—who hope to reach out to Generation We. But our point here is a simple one: *Generation We is fed up with leaders who seek to divide Americans against one another, whether on moral, ethnic, religious, geographic, racial, or economic grounds.* They are looking for leaders who will unite the country around common goals for the greater good that will benefit everyone.

Together, we can create the greatest change in human history—one that combines and builds upon the impact of some previous epochs of change as the Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution, the Democratic Revolution, and the Digital Revolution. We can usher in an era of plenty for all people on a shared planet that is environmentally sustainable, culturally diverse, and permanently at peace. The Millennials can lead the way—and all of us can help.

“For in the end, freedom is a personal and lonely battle; and one faces down fears of today so that those of tomorrow might be engaged.”

ALICE WALKER