

21/64

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR //

Many themes have remained constant for Jews in America. Not until now, however, could we say that “unfettered access” challenges us to foster Jewish community and meaning for two generations that no longer live or socialize solely in a Jewish context.

I recently read *When Generations Collide*, a book co-written by Baby Boomer Lynne C. Lancaster and Generation Xer David Stillman. While I thought I understood what it meant to operate in a multi-generational setting, this book opened my eyes to how unique social, cultural and economic experiences shaped each generation. For example, Traditionals (born 1900-1945) were indelibly imprinted with the experiences of World War I, the Depression and the New Deal, while Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964) were informed by the advent of television and the optimism of post World War II opportunities. (Born in 1945, I learned that I was a “Cusper” and can play a unique role in bringing understanding to generational conflicts!)

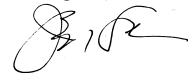
While Lancaster and Stillman’s book focuses on four generations in the workplace, we are witnessing how four generations bring their distinct perspectives to the philanthropic table. If that is the case, how can we begin to understand the historic experiences that inform Generation X (born 1965-1980) and the Millennials or Generation Y (born 1981-1999) who are now joining the boards of our foundations? Furthermore, what has changed Jewishly to influence the historical perspectives of those two generations? One major theme that seems different for younger generations is their unfettered access to American society. Many themes have remained

constant for Jews in America including the fact that each succeeding generation is more prosperous, more suburban and more unaffiliated. Not until now, however, could we say that “unfettered access” challenges us to foster Jewish community and meaning for two generations that no longer live or socialize solely in a Jewish context.

To learn about the implications of this new reality, we set out to ask the following questions: How have Gen X and Gen Y Jews been uniquely affected by access to the universal? How has their acceptance in America shaped them in relation to older generations that struggled with inclusion? And if Jews are interacting with all Americans now, is what we are seeing in the Jewish community happening in other ethnic and religious communities as well? Is this new Jewish experience not just Jewish but generational?

This issue of the 21/64 newsletter highlights how we have begun to address these questions in our work. As always, we are interested in hearing what you are learning through your funding explorations.

Best Regards,



Jeff Solomon

UNIVERSAL → vs. ← PARTICULAR

Generation after generation of Jews in America have wrestled with issues such as their relationship to Israel, community leadership, and tension between inclusion and exclusion in American society. This next generation, however, is the first to experience virtually unfettered access to American society, and in doing so, has caused a paradigm shift in the way we define religious identity today.

While “being Jewish” used to define religious practice, community, even political beliefs, today, young Jews no longer live or socialize solely with other Jews and are marrying non-Jewish partners. It is the norm to gain entry into Ivy League universities, Wall Street firms and country clubs from which their parents and grandparents were prohibited. Generations X and Y are experiencing America no-holds-barred.



NOT JUST JEWISH, GENERATIONAL //

An integrated American experience has led to a shifting religious paradigm for all faith groups.

Reserving a sense of separate meaning while integrating into American society appears not just to be a Jewish challenge—Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim communities are experiencing this as well. While previous generations practiced religion by attending churches, synagogues, and mosques, today the emergence of Christian rock, Lutheran emerging ethos communities and Jewish salons demonstrate that an integrated American experience has led to a shifting religious paradigm for all faith groups.

To understand how this shift affects the Jewish community, we have begun to study this broader phenomenon of the next generation's unrestricted access to American society. We are working with Anna Greenberg, Vice President of the DC-based pollsters Greenberg, Quinlan Rosner Research, to ascertain if changes in identity formation, community, and meaning are defined differently for younger generations.

OMG! HOW GENERATION Y IS REDEFINING FAITH IN THE IPOD ERA //

In the middle are youth for whom religion is one part of their identity, along with other concerns such as finding a job, getting good grades, and maintaining strong relationships.

Greenberg, along with an academic advisory committee, designed a survey of Generation Y (ages 18-25) to explore religious identity among young people, how they practice their religion and the communal activities that emerge from their practices. The team polled approximately 1300 youth from Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, African American, Latino, and Asian American backgrounds and discovered *OMG! (Oh My God!) How Generation Y is Redefining Faith in the iPod Era*.

Greenberg ascribed survey respondents to one of three broad groups: the *Godly* (27%) for whom religion and God are a central part of their lives and are quite happy with traditional forms of religious community and practice; on the other end of the spectrum are the *God-less* (27%) for whom religion plays little role, but who may have spiritual or ideological commitments; and in the middle are the *Undecided* (46%) who are positive about their religious identities, but prefer informal and expressive as opposed to formal and institutional hallmarks of religious observance.

ENGAGING THE MIDDLE //

What are the mechanisms that would engage the Undecided in Jewish life?

We at ACBP choose to focus our strategic attention on the middle group. We ask ourselves, what are the mechanisms that would engage the Undecided in Jewish life?

We discovered that the Rose Community Foundation (RCF) of Denver, Colorado is asking similar questions. RCF invited us to interview young Jews in the Denver community. We found highly educated and motivated people interested in civic issues, but almost all characterize themselves as “unaffiliated” or “secular” because they have not yet found a home

for their Jewish identity that resonates with their universal American experience.

The Denver “natives” we listened to said that Jewish tradition may be rich in history, text, and ritual, but their experiences of Jewish life have been “unintellectual,” “uninspiring,” and “uncool.” While they may sound imprudent, all were successful self-starters who organized book clubs, trips to the local music and comedy festivals, even a *chavurah* when they could not find “meaningful” Jewish experiences elsewhere.



INNOVATION //

While many Jewish institutions across the country are offering programs for 20- and 30- somethings, they are not succeeding in capturing their target audience.

Many young Jews, like those we met in Denver, are not apathetic in their search for community; rather, they are hungry for Jewish life that is meaningful in their generation's terms. While many Jewish institutions across the country are offering programs for 20- and 30-somethings, they are not succeeding in capturing the target audience.

While we at ACBP do not have all the answers, we have learned a few lessons in working with the next generation. Namely, there are no silver bullets. The world around us is changing exponentially, and younger audiences have complex needs. New technologies are allowing consumers to customize their experiences of music and TV. In this milieu, how can the Jewish community differentiate between a passing trend and a paradigm shift, which ignored, may be to our peril? Instead of assuming we have all the answers, we are at least asking young Jews the right questions: Who are you? And how do you want to experience Jewish life in America?

Like RCF, we are also supporting innovation, setting aside a small percentage of risk capital to fund new mechanisms in order to engage the Undecided, those young Jews who are searching for ways to express their Jewish identity that resonate with their American experience. While some of these new experiments may be too young to measure, we are committed to supporting innovation in order to achieve Jewish continuity.

OMG!

For more information on how to get a copy of *OMG! How Generation Y is Redefining Faith in the iPod Era*, or how to work with 21/64 in your own community, email us at info@2164.net.

OMG! How Generation Y is Redefining Faith in the iPod Era is co-sponsored by ACBP, the Carnegie Corporation, CIRCLE Fund, The Nathan Cummings Foundation, Surdna Foundation, and the Walter and Elise Haas Fund.