

How Millennial Youth Are Taking Over America  
And Changing Our World Forever



**GENERATION  
WE**

ERIC GREENBERG with KARL WEBER

*"As it is my design to make those that can scarcely read understand, I shall therefore avoid every literary ornament and put it in language as plain as the alphabet."*

THOMAS PAINE

*"There are only two mistakes one can make along the road to truth; not going all the way, and not starting."*

BUDDHA

*"Ye shall know the truth,  
and the truth shall make you free."*

JOHN 8:32



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# **GENERATION WE**

**By ERIC H. GREENBERG  
with KARL WEBER**

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To my children, Jackson and Charlie, the two souls whose lives mean more to me than my own and are the reason I am compelled to work toward making our world a better place;

To the love of my life, my wife Carmel, who has blessed me with unconditional love and has given me the support and understanding that allows me to evolve into a better human being and pursue my life's work;

To Mother Earth, our sustainer, to whom we must return the favor;

And to our Creator who, through love, has bestowed the miracle of life upon us and with whom we are all One.

*“Behold, O Monks,  
this is my last advice to you.  
All conditioned things  
in the world are changeable.  
They are not lasting.  
Try to accomplish your own  
salvation with diligence.”*

*(BUDDHA'S LAST WORDS)*



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introduction:

# A GIFT FOR A BETTER WORLD



## > Who Am I to Write This Book?

### A Message from Eric Greenberg

**I have been blessed to live the American Dream. I have been fortunate enough to be endowed with some personal gifts—a degree of intelligence, a strong work ethic, and, most important, an ability to make things happen. I have been able to parlay these gifts into an incredible life journey, where I have gained financial success, the chance to help others, and some wonderful opportunities to experience the world. My life almost seems too good to be true—but it is true.**

I did not have much when I was young. I remember going without haircuts, taping together my broken glasses, and having only one pair of sneakers that would be replaced once my socks were starting to show through the holes.

The home in which I was raised was unhappy and emotionally chaotic. We lived in a succession of lower middle-class neighborhoods, rife with prejudice, violence, and crime. Racial and class tension were everyday facts of life. The schools I attended were mediocre and infused with a dog-eat-dog spirit.

I began working at 14 and spent seven years selling shoes to support myself. I left home at 16 years of age, and was for all practical purposes, on my own.

Through hard work and a little luck, I was able to go to fine universities and gain an incredible education. At the time tuition at the University of Texas at Austin was only 800 dollars per semester for a nonresident. I could not afford a graduate degree, so I went to work and was able to get a great job in information technology, despite having no education or training in the subject. Back in 1985, one did not have to have an advanced degree and technical training just to find an



► In central Australia with Aboriginal elder

entry-level job, and opportunities for good jobs, especially in growth sectors such as technology, were not exported overseas. People got hired based on talent, intelligence, and desire to succeed.

Back in 1985, banks were not pushing debt onto students like drug dealers, so I left college owing less than 10,000 dollars. Unlike many middle-class students today, I was not enslaved to financial institutions and was able to start my life with a more or less clean slate. I had only

the future to worry about.

As a Reagan Republican, I did not believe I should have anything provided to me. Rather, I knew I had to earn everything through my individual effort. But I did not understand the American social contract that had been built over 200 years by many brave souls. I attended a land grant school whose low tuition was made possible by public support. Business was not focused solely on quarterly earnings. Companies still believed they had obligations to their employees; decent healthcare and a reliable pension were considered rights, not privileges. It was a time of greater human decency.

Through hard work, applied intelligence, and good timing, I was able to prosper. By the turn of the century, I was a paper billionaire at 35 years of age. I flew around the world in private jets. Sir Elton John played at my wedding. I had every material good one could ever dream for—but it came with a price. Overindulgence created chaos at every turn in my life. Although I was lucky enough to have a stable relationship with my wife, everything else around me devolved into a pit of misfortune, conflict, and poor health.

I was miserable. By 2004, I weighed 275 pounds, was dependent on prescription medication, depressed, and sometimes selfish and thoughtless. I was imploding from my ambition-driven ego. The world was giving me a valuable lesson: Life is not about things and what you do for yourself.

My life was unsustainable. Eventually, one of my friends saw me and told me I looked horrible and would be dead in six months if I did not get my act together. He took me to his hotel suite in New York and lectured me for two hours. The message sank in. The next day, I closed my business and stopped working.

I immediately started the long road back to redemption. I was so unfit, I couldn't walk uphill facing forward because of the back pain from gravity pulling my stomach. I spent a full year building my fitness to the point where I could trail-run 20 miles. I went on to

lose more than 60 pounds, get off prescription drugs, and completely change my diet and lifestyle, becoming an outdoor enthusiast and a lover of the environment.

I also began spiritual study, endeavoring to understand the meaning of life and what my life should mean. I became a nicer person and a better husband and father, changing from being spiritless to spiritual and switching political affiliations.

By 2006, I was ready to re-emerge from my two-year-long makeover. Retirement was not for me, so I had to find out what the meaning of my life should be, and I had to learn how to live again. I traveled to remote places, challenging my mental, physical, and spiritual strengths to their capacities. I visited many ancient and sacred places and spent a lot of time with indigenous people, learning their customs and receiving their wisdom. I rediscovered the joy of living and became truly happy for the first time.

## MY EPIPHANY: A LIFE OF SERVICE

On September 29, 2006, I was in the belly of Earth, the Amazon jungle. Then and there my life was changed forever. I had my epiphany.

I was pondering my future in a hut in the middle of the rainforest, several hours by motorized boat from the nearest jungle port. A dear friend of mine, who was instrumental in leading me into my spiritual path, had once shared with me his reason for existence: unconditional service to mankind. I never quite understood what that meant until that night.

I came to understand that we are all connected, as a species and as a planet. We are all related, genetically proven to be descendants of a single ancestral woman who lived in Africa some 140,000 years ago. Thus, there is no separateness of people from our Creator or each other. We are here to learn and evolve as souls, and this journey we call life is about having a higher purpose and meaning beyond satisfaction of our senses and accumulating possessions. Life is about working on behalf of others, taming our egos, and sharing our talents to make the planet a better place. This does not mean asceticism or denial; rather it means that all actions should have meaning and purpose and one's behavior must be congruent with that.

I realized that there is truth in all religions, and that we must be at peace and one with Earth, our host. We are all sub-organisms of this great living planet.

Knowing that my life would never be the same, I then pondered my future. The Inner Voice gave me two inspirations. I have worked



► Bringing food to a remote mountain village in Peru



► Children in Peruvian mountain village

**Today, however, I worry about the world my two children are inheriting. Their birthright of a world that is in better condition than the one their parents received has been violated.**

full-time on them every day since then and will continue to do so for the rest of my days.

The first inspiration was about the health and nutrition crisis.

We have an obesity and healthcare crisis in America today primarily driven by preventable disease, where the underlying cause is poor nutrition and bad food. Its social and financial costs are unconscionable. Fake and bad foods are the primary causes of obesity, cancer, heart disease, and diabetes. The best cure is prevention and eating good food. I started a company called Beautiful, which makes prepared, fresh food that is tasty, healthy, and real. Our mission is to serve the world better food—the best you can eat.

### RESTORING OUR CHILDREN'S BIRTHRIGHT: THE REASON FOR THIS BOOK

The second inspiration was about my children and their future, and that of every other young person on the planet. Once upon a time in America, everyone had access to the American dream. It was a birthright. I am living proof of it.

Today, however, I worry about the world my two children are inheriting. Their birthright of a world that is in better condition than the one their parents received has been violated. Further, all children should have the same opportunity to thrive, just as I did. Instead, we have a permanent underclass, and it is increasingly harder for the less fortunate to survive, much less succeed. Because we are all connected, inhabiting the same planetary biosphere, we must restore our children's future and birthright.

There are roughly 95 million youth living in the United States born between the years 1978 and 2000. Sometimes referred to as the Millennial generation, I call them "Generation We" because of the

selflessness and devotion to the greater good that characterize them. By contrast, there are only about 78 million Baby Boomers, the generation that rules the country today. Generation We will be

in power very shortly. The same is true on a global scale. Humanity's median age was 28 in 2005, and it is decreasing every year. This means more than half the people in the world are under 30 years of age.

There are enough of them that today's youth could become a political force that could dominate all political factions and institutions if they are united and share beliefs and long-term planetary orientation. Youth at present do not have the sense of just how powerful they are, despite differences in race, religion, party affiliation, geography, and gender. Nor do they share an agenda, as the great institutions of power

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► Summit of Mount Pachatusan in Peru, elevation 15,930 feet

and the industries and media they control have prevented the unification of the youth around a common purpose.

## AN AGENDA, NOT A PLAN

The Millennials are a special generation, potentially the greatest generation ever. They are not pessimistic or vengeful. Rather, they are sober in their view of the world. They believe in technology and know they can innovate themselves out of the mess they are inheriting. They believe in entrepreneurship and collective action, and that each person *can* make a difference. They are about plenitude, and they reject cruelty. They are spiritual, responsible, tolerant, and in many ways more mature than their predecessor generations. They reject punditry and bickering, because they are post-partisan, post-ideological, and post-political.

Most important, they believe in the greater good and are ready to dedicate themselves to achieving it.

We propose an agenda for Generation We, a slate of things to be done that serve the best interests of those who have a common need. An agenda is not a plan; it is shared intention. A plan must be inclusive and multipartisan, and it must have broad-based support with the political will to implement its mechanisms and ends.

Youths have the common need of a future worth living, where they can enjoy, in the immortal words of the Declaration of Independence, “certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.” Remember that the majority of our Founding Fathers were only in their twenties and thirties at the time our great nation was created from the Revolution in 1776 to the implementation of the Constitution in 1789—not much older than the Millennial generation today. They shared an agenda and created the greatest nation and form of government that the world has ever seen.

## PROTECTING OUR CONSTITUTION

I am a passionate believer in the American system—the concept of freedom under law, and a flexible, balanced government responsive to the will of the people as formulated by our Founders and delineated in the Constitution they wrote more than two centuries ago. It grieves me to see how that system has been abused and eroded in recent decades with the help of members of both major political parties. I am writing in hopes that my message will help mobilize millions of citizens—particularly Generation We—to reclaim their power under the

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constitutional system and return our government to its rightful role of serving the common good.

Politics today is mainly about spin—about twisting facts and ideas in support of a particular ideology, whether of right or left, and a particular party, whether Republican or Democratic. My message in this book should be about reason, not spin; about facts, not emotions; about common sense (as appealed to by the great Thomas Paine) rather than partisan passion.

All of the data we researched in writing the book—our extensive proprietary survey results, the transcripts of our focus groups, and a detailed research bibliography—are on the web at [www.gen-we.com](http://www.gen-we.com) to be judged objectively by anyone interested. We are hiding nothing and not manipulating any facts. This is about truth and the start of a conversation that leads to a course of correction. Transparency is the way we choose to achieve that end.

## A LABOR OF LOVE

Over the past two years, I've found a number of friends and allies who shared my worries about our world and bought into my vision of what to do about it. They have helped me transform my epiphany in the Amazon jungle into the germ of a planetary movement, beginning with this book. It has been quite literally a labor of love.

As I'll explain in more detail in just a few pages, I met talented social and political scientists who had already been studying the problems and opportunities confronting Generation We. I worked with these experts to sponsor the most detailed and probing research ever done into the Millennial generation, the better to understand their interests, values, strengths, and concerns.

I got to meet many members of Generation We as well. Of course, they are as varied as any other group of human beings. But I found that they include some of the smartest, most caring, and most spiritually grounded people I have ever met. I came away from these encounters more convinced than ever that today's youth have the capacity to change the world for the better, provided they have the knowledge and the will.

I also spoke with and read the writings of many of the world's leading experts on the major problems of our time, from our reliance on fossil fuels and our burgeoning burden of debt to the deepening crises affecting the environment, healthcare, and education. This research greatly enhanced my understanding of the world that the next generation will inherit as well as my sense of what they will need to do to reverse the destructive trends older people have set in motion.

Finally, in November 2007, I met Karl Weber, a talented writer who had previously worked on several books dealing with major social and political issues, including, most recently, *Creating a World Without*

*"Until he extends his circle of compassion to include all living things, man will not himself find peace."*

ALBERT SCHWEITZER

*“The means by which we live have outdistanced the ends for which we live. Our scientific power has outrun our spiritual power. We have guided missiles and misguided men.”*

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

*Poverty* by Muhammad Yunus, the Bangladeshi economist who pioneered microcredit and received the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize for his creative work helping some of the world’s poorest people escape poverty. When I shared my ideas with Karl, he became very excited and quickly agreed to collaborate with me. We spent a lot of time together talking about my ideas, and Karl did extensive research and reading of his own to back up the concepts we developed.

The result of all these shared experiences and efforts is the book you are holding.

## DENIAL IS NO LONGER AN OPTION

The problems of today will not go away if we just sweep them under the rug and ignore them. They will only get worse. We cannot rely on those bound by special interests or protecting their turf to enact great changes and create a new order of justice and fairness. We need the unjaded youth, with their energy, optimism, and sense of purpose, to lead the world out of the mess it is in and toward the full potential of mankind.

On January 6, 1941, Franklin D. Roosevelt gave a famous speech describing what he called “the Four Freedoms”:

- > **Freedom of speech and expression**
- > **Freedom to worship**
- > **Freedom from want**
- > **Freedom from fear**

The Four Freedoms are still hugely important. But based on the progression of our society and technology, we need to accompany them with the Four Fundamental Rights:

- > **Right to health—an unspoiled environment, good nutrition, and affordable healthcare**
- > **Right to a good education**
- > **Right to clean, affordable energy**
- > **Right to information, including computing power and unfettered Internet access**

In the contemporary world, the Four Fundamental Rights are needed for people to have the opportunity to live life to the fullest and contribute to society to the best of their ability. Making them a reality for all should be part of the Millennial agenda.

## THE AMERICAN BIRTHRIGHT

This book is for our future. The most powerful force that can make our future better than our past is the youth binding together on the outcome, resolve, and political will to achieve it, no matter how they may differ on details of implementation.

I'm not a member of Generation We, and I don't aspire to lead it. My hope in writing this book is that it will inspire a handful of great leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., or Mahatma Gandhi to emerge and lead their peers.

I do know solutions are out there, waiting to be mobilized by the creative, entrepreneurial spirit of our people. And I have faith that with open, informed debate, Americans can use the system we inherited from the Founders to make the wisest long-term choices and get our country back on the track toward peace, prosperity, and freedom.

This, I believe, is our American birthright. And if my book has a single message, it is simply this: Now is the time to reclaim it.

Eric H. Greenberg  
July 4, 2008

► In the Amazon Jungle, where the idea for this book originated

