HELEN FOX

Their Highest VocATION

Social Justice and the Millennial Generation
Introduction

Dear Ms. Fox,

I am a fan of your work. I grew up an avid activist and have always been very passionate about making a difference within my community. The past few years, I have been focused on prisoner rights, mostly juvenile prisoners. As I'm sure you know, in the United States, and especially in the State of Michigan, putting juveniles in adult prisons for life without the option of parole is a very big problem. I would like to do an independent study/anthropological research project on the issue in hopes I can show people that locking these kids up for life and not giving them the opportunities that can help them lead a better life and make a difference in their community is wrong. I have made a connection to the prisons and am waiting to hear back to see if I can plan a timeline of dates for interviewing, observing, studying, etc.

What I need now is an adviser to help me with this. I cannot do it alone, it is too big a project and to be honest, it’s not about getting credit for me. This is more to me than school—this is what I want to do with my life and I want to do it now. When I find an issue I believe in, I will do anything to make sure that I can help and follow through. I want to make a difference and I want to prove that I can be a good anthropologist.

I know you’re not a professor of anthropology, but you are someone who teaches about making a difference in the world and about peace, and someone who I look up to for that. I am asking you for help; if you know of anybody who would advise me, or if you could even be my adviser, or even give me pointers, I would appreciate it sincerely.
This e-mail arrived while I was immersed in my own research project on social justice education and the Millennial generation. I was touched by this student’s energy, her intense desire to “make a difference,” her willingness to contact a faculty member she had only read about online, and her youthful sense of urgency—this is what I want to do with my life and I want to do it now—all of which, I thought, was emblematic of the Millennial students I was reading about—and whom I had taught for the last ten years at the University of Michigan.

Shortly after the turn of the century, some of the long-time faculty started noticing something different about the students showing up in our classes and coming to us for advice. While my courses in human rights, race and racism, nonviolence, and development in the Global South had attracted many outstanding students in the past, these young people were particularly bold in their belief that they could plunge right in and solve the world’s problems. Some of them had impressive résumés right out of high school: internships abroad and community service at home, perhaps starting a chapter of Amnesty International, or organizing a concert to raise money for cancer research or a children’s hospital. By their third or fourth year in college, many of these students had been involved in a dizzying array of social justice activities on and off campus, often in leadership roles, while still maintaining a high grade point average. One of my advisees, for example, was double majoring in Creative Writing and Social Theory and Practice (writing an honors thesis for each) and, in her spare time, had planned and facilitated weekly writing workshops for Michigan prisoners, coordinated campus conferences on immigration rights, organized Latina workers fighting labor abuses, tutored low-income Spanish-speaking women, and organized volunteers and participants in an after-school tutoring program for socioeconomically disadvantaged youth. And that was only the beginning. She had also organized a grief support network for students, given public lectures on prison reform, and, at graduation, she was working on an entirely new project: a prison museum, “conceptually analogous to the Holocaust Museum,” she told me. Visitors would be assigned the identity of an actual inmate and walked through that individual’s life and prison experience in order to give the public a
fuller sense of their humanity and the complexity of their situations. She is twenty-two years old.

No longer is it unusual to hear of an undergraduate who has raised thousands of dollars to build a school in a Kenyan slum where she had worked over her summer vacation—right after she completed an internship with the United Nations. Nor is it surprising that a couple of undergrads would team up to organize and staff a program in Ecuador, complete with courses, readings, home stays, and field trips, so their fellow students could learn about global poverty firsthand. I even had a sophomore who led a team of physicians and graduate students to Vietnam, his parents’ home country, to research health problems and advise the Vietnamese government on best hospital practices. Clearly, this kind of student engagement was different from my own experience in the 1960s, when as one of the early Peace Corps Volunteers I had embarked on an adventure to a remote corner of India with a vague notion of helping out. It was different, too, from the single-minded determination of the students who had marched in Selma, or had massed by the hundreds of thousands to protest the Vietnam War. This new kind of student activism seemed to be built on brash individual initiative, the confidence to pick up the phone and make things happen, an entrepreneurship for the good of others that valued immediate action over words, or context, or history.

As Millennial students started arriving in our social justice courses with their grand plans to change the world, instructors were also noticing, somewhat paradoxically, that they seemed to have a greater need for structure, an insistence on detailed explanations of the assignments and exactly how their work would be evaluated. Faculty who preferred a looser, more reflective classroom, with discussion rather than lecture and questions to which there were no right answers, were met with student frustration and, at times, a troubling insistence that teachers should present more facts and examples leading to definite conclusions that they could reproduce on papers and tests, rather than asking them to consider for themselves what those facts might mean. They were good workers: quick, efficient learners, polite, and willing. Yet they seemed reluctant to express points of view that might differ from those of their peers, or stray
very far from their idea of "what the teacher wants." Many of them were energized by calls for swift, immediate action: Stop the genocide in Darfur! Fund earthquake relief in Haiti! Go Green! Yet they became discouraged when we asked them to investigate the complex interconnections of social problems, their multiple, inconclusive causes, the pitfalls of quick solutions. Where did such determined energy and, at the same time, such anxious conformity, such "intellectual timidity," as one of my colleagues put it, come from? And how should progressive educators respond to it?

As I embarked on my project to understand our work this new generation, I reflected on my own development as an educator. Hired by the writing program in the early 1990s to work with U-M's increasingly multicultural population, I had quickly found ways to get students thinking about the values I cared most about: equality, inclusion, and peace with justice. My classroom style had been influenced by many progressive educators including Paulo Freire and Myles Horton—both of whom I had met in graduate school—as well as John Holt, whose gentle voice had critiqued the rigid teaching style common in U.S. schools in the 1960s, and Jonathan Kozol, who had worked in the Boston ghetto at around the same time I had, and whose moral outrage in Death at an Early Age paralleled my own indignation at a racist school system that destroyed children's humanity through a lethal combination of arrogance, incompetence, prejudice, and fear. I came to college teaching rather late in life—I was almost fifty when I joined Michigan's faculty—hoping to "make a difference" in my own way by teaching students at an elite university to question standard assumptions about race, culture, poverty, and the inevitability of war.

I started my research for this book by rereading Freire and contemporary commentators on his work. Invoking Tolstoy, Freire reminds us that man's highest vocation is to become more fully human, that is, to live to one's fullest potential by working in "dialogue, hope, humility and sympathy" for a world of greater equality between peoples, a more just order among nations, a world in which it will be easier to love." This, indeed, is a goal that progressive educators and their students have always shared. But students' longing for a better world must
be shaped and nurtured, informed and interrogated by facts, analysis, reflection, experience, and opportunities for leadership.

How, then, should progressive educators address this particular generation's desire to serve humanity? What do these students, especially the relatively privileged students at elite universities, need to know? How can more of them be drawn into significant social justice work? What skills and whose knowledge should the college experience provide? How can we nourish the mental and spiritual stamina these young people will need as they confront injustice? What unique strengths do they bring that educators can build on? What weaknesses should we address? In what ways should the university's overall mission change to help the Millennial generation make effective contributions to the social good?

Those were some of the questions that came to mind as I read and reflected on the characteristics of this generation and the history of progressive education. Soon I realized I needed to talk to other faculty who teach U-M's social justice courses, counsel Millennial students, and direct programs that reach these students through experiential learning, reflection, dialogue, and service. I also needed to hear from students themselves, both current undergraduates whom I knew to be social justice leaders and recent graduates who are taking their Michigan education into the world. In the end, I recorded, transcribed, and analyzed thirty-two, one- to two-hour interviews—or, in most cases, "collaborative conversations"—with twelve progressive U-M faculty and staff, seven program heads (who are also faculty or staff), eight student leaders, four recent U-M graduates working in social justice fields, and a community storyteller, who, as an intellectual and an elder "telling history" in impoverished local schools, offers insight into what educators should be doing at the college level. I made no attempt to choose my conversation partners randomly; I knew them all through various collegial relationships. They had been students in my classes, or my advisees, or respected colleagues, or simply people I knew to be doing good work. For chapter 7, "Teaching Peace," I drew on my previous research on college students' attitudes toward war and peace, where my undergraduate research assistants and I had talked to eighty U-M undergraduates,
about a quarter of whom had taken my class on nonviolence. All these stimulating interviews were extremely helpful to my thinking. They built on and challenged my ideas and those of the authors I was reading; they added new questions and some wonderful stories and often led the conversation in unexpected directions. I highlight my informants’ voices throughout this book in order to reproduce as accurately as possible their thoughts and convictions, their contemplative moments, their uncertainties, frustrations, passion, and insights.

I would like to express my deep appreciation to the students and colleagues who engaged me in these long, intense conversations, read my drafts, and trusted me to tell their stories. Many thanks also to my daughter Cybelle Fox and my step-daughter, Sara Koopman, who supported and challenged my thinking in most productive ways, and to my husband Jim Koopman, whose generous spirit offers me the space and time to do this work.

This book is dedicated to my grandchildren, Sarah, Devyn, Kendall, and Aidan, who, at twelve, seven, four, and four months, will soon inherit a world shaped by the dreams and foibles of today’s college students—the Millennial generation.

Notes

4. Tolstoy, 1914. “The highest vocation in the world is that of those who live in order to serve God by bringing good into the world and who have joined together for that very purpose” p. 51.
6. Ibid., 24.
"I get a little frustrated in class sometimes," Carrie tells me—a bit hesitantly, since it’s my grassroots development course we’re talking about. "Sometimes it’s just not real enough to have all these classroom discussions. There’s so much information, so much context to consider, so many different opinions among students; it’s all so rapid fire. There’s no time to just look each other in the eye and develop real relationships. That’s the most important thing, whether you’re sitting in a classroom, or working as an organizer, or travelling in impoverished communities abroad: to know that authentic relationships between human beings are not only important, but that they’re possible."

Carrie had been particularly taken with the idea of authentic relationships when she read Pedagogy of the Oppressed, which, she says, has become a kind of life manual for her. "The biggest thing I got out of reading Freire is that we’re all incomplete," she tells me. "And that means ‘the oppressor’ needs to be in the kind of dialogue with ‘the oppressed’ where they both come out ‘more fully human.’" She puts in the quotation marks with her fingers, laughing a little, as if she isn’t entirely comfortable with Freire’s language. One of Carrie’s most memorable
attempts at getting into an authentic relationship was at a conference of Latina domestic workers in California where she went almost on a whim. She had learned the basics of organizing by volunteering at a workers’ center near the university, and had become fascinated with the idea that immigrants who do informal, unregulated household labor could be organized and empowered through interaction with college students like herself. So when the California conference came along, and with it the opportunity to use her fledgling Spanish, she hopped on a plane and arrived at the organizing conference, ready to offer her support.

“I kept telling the domestic workers I was there to help them,” Carrie reflected. “And I was forgetting everything Freire says about where that impulse should come from. The women accosted me so many times for that! They were like, ‘How dare you? Why would you think we need your help? Get over yourself!’”

“And how did you feel about that?” I ask her.

“Like, oh shit!” Carrie says, laughing. “I thought that just by going to that conference, showing my interest, using my privilege to help empower the workers was what Freirian dialogue was all about! But of course that's not at all what Freire had in mind. My attempts at conversation were so patronizing. It was—just all wrong! And then I started thinking, ‘What am I doing here?’ And when I couldn’t come up with a good answer to that, I thought maybe I should just sit back and listen to what the women are saying. And while I was taking it all in, I started thinking, ‘Wow, this is the first time I’ve been the only white person in the room.’ I just reflected on that for a while. So then I tried to backtrack, and during the break, I went up to the women who’d yelled at me, and I tried to apologize: ‘Thank you for challenging me—um, not to belittle you by thanking you for that.’ I was trying so hard not to step on toes! Of course, they were still dubious. But I just kept on talking, saying the first thing that came into my mind: ‘I know this is wrong. I don’t need to keep making these mistakes. Just tell me what I need to say instead.’”

“So did they help you out?”

“They did! I think they could see that I got why they were so annoyed. Here I am this white girl from a little, all-white town in
Michigan. I’m not a domestic worker. I’m not Latina. Why would I show up at their conference when I knew so little about how I might actually be useful? But they ended up helping me out, and I made some great relationships in the process. That’s so important, I think, so critical to the kind of social justice leadership I’m trying to figure out. I mean, as much as these barriers are real, and as much as race and class privilege need to be acknowledged, I think we can end up paying so much attention to our differences that we no longer see the other person as just another human being. That’s what I’m always scared of. I’m scared I’ll forget that we are all just people.”

Carrie has good reason to dwell on these relationships. Growing up on a cozy apple farm in rural Michigan, she and her favorite doll, Allison, each in their matching red aprons, would help her grandma sell fresh cider and sugar doughnuts to passersby, or roam the orchard with the “pickers”—seasonal workers from Haiti and Jamaica who lived in dilapidated shacks out behind the barn. Carrie had become special friends with Slim and George, the loyal workers her parents often referred to as “part of the family.” The time she spent with these men defined her childhood, Carrie tells me. They were her protectors, her role models, and along with Allison, her best friends. They would stand with her at the school bus stop, keeping her safe from traffic in the early morning dusk. They would join the family for Thanksgiving dinner and breakfast on Christmas morning. And when George surprised her by showing up at her ten-year-old birthday party with a small gift, Carrie threw her arms around him and burst into tears. “It was an affirmation of our friendship,” Carrie says. “Or so it seemed at the time.”

One day just before she left for college, Carrie was sitting on the porch with her dad, reading the paper, when she came upon a piece about the Coalition of Immokalee Workers in Florida, who were organizing a strike against tomato growers for better wages and working conditions. “I was reading this news article and then I was like, ‘Wait! Dad! There’s something wrong here!’” Carrie laughs, thinking back to her sudden revelation. “This article I’m reading right now about the Immokalee workers, this is what we’re doing! We live in a seven bedroom house, but the pickers’ quarters are horrible—the roofs are leaking, the
floors are sinking in, there's broken glass everywhere. We're white and everyone that works for us is black! Dad—this is problematic! What's going on?"

Carrie's dad took her accusations calmly and with a touch of good humor, for his daughter's liberalism had always been a gentle joke. "I was the token 'you should recycle that,' and 'let's not refer to people in that way' person at my high school," she told me. "So my family sort of expected me to take that role at home." Carrie's dad explained that he could not really see himself as the "exploiter" and the workers as the "exploited," since those terms did not acknowledge the complexity of human relationships, especially when your workers are "part of the family." The housing he provided was the best in the state, according to the local newspaper. And without the migrant workers, he reminded her, the farm wouldn't have survived as long as it had.

Carrie had written about all this in her first college paper for my seminar on human rights. And even before that, when she was on the farm drafting her admissions essays, she had begun reflecting on what those relationships meant, despite her father's attempts to smooth things over. "I know now," she wrote, "even though admitting it tears open my heart, these men were not 'playmates, protectors, role-models, and family,' but workers, probably illegal workers. I would like to believe that the jobs our family gave them were better than any other they might find, but I think that our orchard serves as an example of the capitalist system that exploits human beings in order to make a profit."

Every semester Carrie comes back to this essay and "finds new layers in it." She writes endlessly in her journal, reflecting on the child she was when those relationships were fresh, and the young adult she is now. She remembers how as a teenager, after the farm had failed and the migrants had found work elsewhere, she ran into one of her old "best friends" at the bank. "It was such a strange interaction," she tells me a bit wistfully. "I was so excited to see him. But he just sort of looked away as if he didn't recognize me. And I was just like—'Ohhh.'"  

"What were you thinking at that moment?" I ask.  

"That maybe we weren't quite the friends I had always thought. That there was a lot of hierarchy in the situation that I wasn't aware of, and
that we both had internalized certain expectations about how we had to act with each other—he the Jamaican picker, me the boss's little girl. I don't know. It was not good. It made me very sad.”

“Sad how?”

“Just sad that we were unable to interact comfortably, normally, as human beings. I see it now as very much the result of a situation in which we came to know each other, which was racialized and . . .” Carrie's voice fades into indecisiveness and embarrassment. She is not sure what to think now. There had seemed to be no distance between her and her childhood friends and now that she understood the relationship more fully a barrier had become visible. Had she constructed it herself by dwelling too much on the imbalance of power? Had there actually been an “authentic relationship” between friends, despite the exploitation? Or had she been lulled into believing that her father was a “good master” as in the days of old?

Carrie's willingness to reflect so intensely has been fruitful for her. At least she is asking the right questions. But endlessly interrogating one's relationships across class and race can be debilitating, especially when it is laced with shame and guilt. Carrie tells me about the summer she spent in Argentina, where the poverty so shocked her she felt “paralyzed by difference.” She had been trying to help out at an orphanage—unsuccessfully, she confesses, since “teaching children is really difficult, especially in Spanish”—so instead, she would spend long afternoons in a nearby barrio, getting to know an indigenous family who let her hang out with them, help with the laundry, eat and talk, “stuff I would do with my friends at home.” Carrie had been so appalled by the family’s condition—the dirt floors, the crowded spaces, the racism and exclusion they suffered—that at first, she could not even greet them with a smile and a few words of small talk. Perhaps, in her awkward silence, she heard echoes of her family’s relationship with their loyal pickers; perhaps she was just disoriented by culture shock. But the old questions kept nagging her: How was she going to build the authentic relationships she so desired? How could people who were so different come to appreciate each other across the barrier of privilege, “the huge, huge privilege” that she now understood that she brought to the relationship?
How could she reconcile such vast inequalities with her strong need, an almost spiritual need, I thought, to see the core of the human being through the barriers that keep us apart?

"I think recognizing one’s own part in an oppressive social system is a necessary stage," says Dana, a senior whose sense of her own race and class privilege had been impressed on her by her family for as long as she can remember. "But guilty reflection can take you only so far. I’ve seen people like my parents doing social justice work for decades out of guilt. And when I look at my white, middle-class peers, I see a lot of struggle reconciling personal privilege and suffering, and this creates a very unhealthy situation. It can be hard to even validate your own existence, given that you embody the oppressor. The problem is there’s no positive model out there for antiracist, anti-oppressive activism—for whites at least. So there’s a tendency to shrink into the background and be kind of invisible while you’re doing social justice work in poor communities. You can’t allow yourself to be proud of your contribution—in fact, it can even feel kind of shameful. Anti-oppressive, antiracist leadership requires self-creation, not self-annihilation."

Dana’s insight is profound, I think, and speaks to Carrie’s dilemma: How can we develop authentic human relationships within the oppressive social systems in which we are all entwined? How can elite Millennial students create a new leadership style that fully acknowledges the oppression of the social system, yet offers their skills with pride and confidence? Dana doesn’t think faculty can help much in this endeavor. "I don’t mean to sound pessimistic," she says, "but I think that what the university at its most progressive does best is to provide the theories and the classroom-based discussion and maybe some opportunities to get involved in the real world. I don’t think there’s any way for students to develop a visceral awareness of oppression and privilege, and out of that, create a positive, anti-oppressive identity except by following their own process. It’s something that students need to work out for themselves."

So should we just let our best, most reflective students find their own way as they become the leaders of their generation? Critical self-creation, as Dana terms it, is such a central aspect of a progressive personal devel-
velopment, it seems unlikely that young people will find their way on their own. So many things are still confusing to Carrie. Her loyalty to her family, her strong bonds to her decent, hardworking parents and grandparents, her need for authentic connection, her difficulty—despite her devotion to Freire—in saying the words “oppressor” and “oppressed” without scare quotes and a little laugh, all suggest that she has a lot to work through as she tries “to figure out what social justice leadership is all about.”

But as I talked to students like Carrie and Dana, I began to realize they are already constructing a model of progressive Millennial leadership without the benefit of faculty supervision. Within the university, yet existing alongside it like a parallel universe, is an entirely separate system of education, one without exams or grades or carefully managed opportunities for intellectual growth. In this universe, nearly all the faculty-directed experiences that the university provides—the classes, the research assistantships, the work-study jobs, the study abroad programs, the service opportunities, the counseling and career planning—all these fade into the background. Within their social justice organizations and in their dorm rooms and co-op kitchens, our most progressive Millennials are teaching each other how to be social justice leaders, learning from their more experienced peers, and opening up space for newcomers to join in. And they are learning with a level of excitement and energy that would astonish most faculty.

Carrie ventured into social justice leadership when, as a requirement of my first-year seminar to join a human rights organization, she got herself appointed to the Michigan Student Assembly’s Peace and Social Justice Commission. There, she became acquainted with “older activists”—third- and fourth-year students—who saw her as a willing worker who was eager to learn how to get things done. As Carrie was ending her term on the Commission, a new student initiative, Stop the Hike, was organizing a campaign to convince the University Regents to freeze Michigan’s tuition, which in 2008 had topped $11,000 for in-state and $33,000 for out-of-state undergraduates. One of the organizers suggested that Carrie come along.

As she plunged into the organizing work, Carrie found no carefully
constructed syllabi, no lectures or required reading to orient her to the issues or lay out the skills she would need to learn. “In fact, I had no idea what I was doing,” she says. “I was the only freshman working with a whole bunch of second-semester juniors and seniors who were incredibly knowledgeable and effective.” The groundwork for Stop the Hike had been laid by an experienced student activist who was alarmed about the proposed tuition increase and who happened to know an engineering student with the same concerns. The two of them, the activist and the engineer, had become very excited about a cause that could involve all students, not just the social justice types, but economics students and science and math majors who typically had their own separate organizations, or kept to themselves and concentrated on their schoolwork. Their strategy had started with coalition building among student organizations. They began contacting students who had influence on campus: the president of the Interfraternity Council, students from the business and engineering schools, people from all the student assemblies across the huge campus, and a lot of leaders from student of color organizations.

“That campaign was such a big deal!” Carrie recalls. “There was so much energy that whole year. We used to meet on Wednesday nights—late. We’d start around ten, and we’d be there until midnight or one. And at first I would just look at all those people and ask myself, ‘What is it about them that I admire so much? How can I get myself to be like them?’ Just being in the room with them, I could feel the dedication, the passion, the hard work, the energy, the people skills! You felt that the administration would have to take us seriously, and that felt incredible. Especially because the things we were studying in our classes seemed so far away. This was really hands-on!

“I think I really value energy,” Carrie continues. “When people are somewhere to be there,’ you know? And when you hear the passion in their voices. I would get so excited when someone would say, ‘Okay, we need to e-mail this key person,’ and then someone else would take out their computer and e-mail them, right on the spot. Or a bunch of people would stay for half an hour after a meeting just to follow up on the things they said they would do. It was the dedication, the commitment
that got me. Because sometimes in work like this, it's hard to keep that hope and that belief so solid all the time. These issues are complicated, and you sometimes question, 'What am I really doing?' But when everyone is so passionate and so effective in putting an action together, you don't have those doubts. What we were doing, it wasn't just academic. It wasn't just lip service. It was something we really, really believed in.

"Coming back to the dorm I'd be all fired up, and I'd talk with my roommate about it for hours," Carrie continues. "To work with the president of the Greek system was such a big deal, because fraternities and sororities are generally so disconnected from the progressive peace and justice network. They have their own charitable events, but they don't generally consider themselves politically progressive or even political at all. But this was a cause that could unite all students. And we weren't just doing it because we didn't want to pay more tuition. It wasn't a self-serving thing; it was an issue of social justice."

In their strategy sessions, the students discussed the arguments they could use to convince the administration that holding down tuition costs could be cost-effective as well as ethical. Hard data were critical to their argument. "We decided to research the percentage of students who were dropping out because they couldn't pay," Carrie says. "So we conducted a thousand surveys, did the analysis, and used the results to have conversations with key people in the administration. Then we did an in-depth study of the university budget, and someone found a group of math majors who agreed to analyze it and help the rest of the coalition understand it. We set up meetings with the University Regents—some of them one-on-one—where we explained our reasoning to anyone who was the least bit sympathetic. Then we'd go to the Regents' meetings and we'd take every single slot at public comments time and explain our position formally, with the news media present and a protest outside that we'd organized beforehand."

"So what was the outcome of all this?" I ask.

"Well, the administration raised tuition by 6 percent—which was a lot," says Carrie matter-of-factly. Remarkably, she is not demoralized by their failure. "The longer-lasting outcome was that a lot of relationships were built between groups that had never interacted before, as well as
between the university administration and specific students. We saw it as an example of what could be accomplished by building student power across campus. “

“So the process is everything."

“That’s right! Of course, the goals are important too, but for me, in my freshman year, that campaign was a moment when the students said, ‘We matter. And the administration is going to listen to us, no matter what!’”

“And you felt they listened?”

“I think they listened to the students more during those two months than I’ve seen them listen since. And that was a really, really big thing.”

So during her freshman year, besides carrying a full course load and working to support her financial aid package, Carrie had put herself through an intensive, extracurricular tutorial in the basics of organizing; how to communicate with strangers and fire them up about a cause; how to conduct research and make a convincing case to potential supporters; how to speak at a packed assembly of powerful people who might judge or patronize young students; how to contact the media, put out a press release, and organize a group action that could make a significant impact. For a sheltered first-year student who was just beginning to understand the dynamics of power and privilege, the work was both exciting and intimidating. Carrie would sit in organizing meetings packed with confident, knowledgeable student leaders from all across campus and try to get up her nerve to speak. Even forming her own opinions could be difficult because of the gender dynamics at play; the “big men on campus”—alpha males from fraternities and student government—dominated the conversation with their confident, booming voices, their habit of interrupting each other, their high energy laughter. Watching the more experienced female activists not only hold their own in these meetings but also come up with some of the best ideas, Carrie began to force herself to speak up “after gathering so much courage and trying really hard not to cry” from all that effort and emotion. And when the whole room listened to her respectfully, she says, she learned a lot about herself and what she might be able to accomplish. All through the process, Carrie was making the lasting human relationships she so
valued with people she never thought would notice her, much less work with her on an equal basis.

Of course, Carrie’s parallel education did little to prepare her for her visit to the domestic workers’ organizing conference in California, where she never did have a chance to use the leadership skills she had developed during her first year. Like many progressive white students, Carrie needed more knowledge about why class and race do not just fade into insignificance when people unite around an issue of social justice. In fact, learning to organize around a tuition increase that affected so many students regardless of their race, ethnicity, educational interests, or even class, may have reinforced her tendency to ignore or minimize these differences. But for other students, peer-to-peer learning that focuses their attention intensely on a progressive cause can expose and complicate identity issues as well.

Students might start their informal education with a version of the “bull sessions” that previous generations of activists might recall from their own student days. Gathering late at night in someone’s dorm room or co-op kitchen, progressive Millennial students are talking about political change, labor organizing, global inequalities, environmental activism, food security, immigration, race, and class. Of course, some of these sessions, then and now, are more political posturing than serious inquiry. But the topics get to the heart of the issues students find most intriguing, and the conversations, unlike most of their experience in classes, can take on the toughest questions.

Such conversations might start out simply, with two students chatting as they study. Maybe one of them has taken a course that touched on the subject of race privilege. She interrupts her roommate to share an exchange that happened in class, a disturbing video clip that has been circulating on the Internet, or an insight she had come up with while writing a paper. As the friends discuss these ideas together, they may be drawn into an extended conversation that continues for the rest of the semester. Lauren, a second-year student, who, like Carrie, was drawn into activism through her friendships with older students, tells me how she started learning about oppressive relationships with a friend who was training to be a facilitator in a class on social identities.
"We spent a lot of time talking about my friend's experiences with other students in her class," Lauren recalls. "And for me, that was really enlightening. It's the first time I've really been challenged to step back and realize there are certain things about you that affect other people, whether you're conscious of it or not." She took these new insights to Guatemala where she and another friend traveled over spring break. Lauren wouldn't have noticed this before, but now she was conscious of how she was treated differently "as an American—or maybe as a white person," she says. "Even doing local things, like riding the rickety buses that most people take, I felt we were given more attention by the bus drivers, or maybe treated with more courtesy and respect. At first I thought, 'Well, that's just a cultural thing, they are hospitable people.' I was enjoying it, actually. But then I started wondering . . ."

"How are you thinking about that now?" I ask.

"I don't know. I don't think I've thought enough about it yet," Lauren answers thoughtfully. "It probably has something to do with the tremendous influence for good or bad of the United States on Latin America and how entrenched we are in the fate of other nations, in their economic or political policy. Somehow those power relationships must filter down to the local level. I don't know how. But I definitely want to understand it. Trying to think these things through is a really uncomfortable process for me. But I'm glad it's happening. It's certainly been a major influence on my personal growth this year."

As students reflect on these kinds of experiences and explore ideas together, some are gaining hands-on leadership skills by joining a student group or club focused on social justice issues. This might just happen by chance, or at the invitation of a friend, or, less frequently, through a class or internship. Like Carrie, students generally just watch and listen at first, then find the courage to contribute as they begin to understand the issues and develop the ability to act on them. Their willingness to volunteer for mundane tasks and put in long hours gets the attention of the more senior student activists, who take them on as protégés. These relationships, and the new tasks and challenges that grow out of them, change them profoundly.

"Before I came to college I really didn't have a social conscious-
ness," Lauren tells me frankly. "I went to a private high school with a homogenous population that was superfocused on academics and not at all on social justice issues. Nobody would have started a chapter of Amnesty International at my school! The administration would never have supported that move. It was just academics, academics, academics. So when I came to college, I never thought anything politically progressive was going to happen to me. I started out as a creative writing major because I had always loved stories and literature. I thought I'd want to study abroad for a while, maybe in Latin America, just to get out. But then I got involved with SOLE and it just took off from there."

In her first semester, as a requirement of my class to join any organization on campus with a concern for human rights, Lauren had joined Students Organizing for Labor and Economic Equality (SOLE), a campus group that was trying to convince the university administration to sign on to the Designated Supplier Program, a nationwide effort to have university apparel made by factories that pay living wages, offer worker protections, and allow collective association. Lauren chose that group "because of all the organizations on campus, SOLE had the reputation of being the rabble rousers." The most radical thing that SOLE had actually done was to organize a brief sit-in in the president's office to underscore the need for students to be heard. But in an era where most students are team players who, at best, are content with "tweaking the system"—like holding tuition costs to $33,000 a year—a peaceful campus sit-in can seem truly risky. Lauren was tired of her quiet life and "wanted to join a group that was actually doing something, not just talking about it."

"In SOLE, we had some very dynamic seniors who were willing to work with first-year students," says Lauren. "They were really into teaching us skills related to organizing, strategizing, and action, as well as educating us on global labor issues that were totally new to us. I really like the structure of the organization. We don't have a hierarchy. It's very open. You can bring your own projects to it, and we do things by consensus, so there's a strong community feeling."

As Lauren developed more of a sense of race and class inequalities though her discussions with peers, she brought these issues into the
organization. “Something we’ve begun to talk about among ourselves is the composition of our group,” she told me. “Like, we’re all white. And I don’t think any of us comes from a working-class background, yet we’re all organized around the issue of labor. That’s kind of weird if you think about it. Why would we of all people want to do this work? We don’t really know. But even more important, how can we broaden our membership? We can’t just assume it will happen of its own accord. So we’re asking ourselves, is it the way we portray ourselves to outsiders that’s the problem? Or is it our group dynamics that’s made us so homogeneous? So we’re thinking about these things very hard, very intentionally. But it’s hard to see if we’re making progress. I think it takes a long time and definitely a strong interest in race and class issues in order to understand what’s really going on.”

Lauren’s parents are not pleased with the direction she has chosen. “Every time I go home, all we do is fight, fight, fight,” she tells me. “My dad keeps saying, ‘I can’t believe this is what you’re doing with your life!’ I’ve tried to foster an understanding with them. I’ve explained why I might want to do something where I’m not going to be making a ton of money, something more service oriented, not supercapitalist. But that’s been a difficult process for my parents. They’re very apolitical. They still have this delusion that I’m going to come to my senses and transfer to the business school. But I’ve always been pretty independent, and I think I’ve made my peace with our disagreements.”

Developing a vision of Millennial social justice leadership can be easier, in a sense, for students of color, immigrants, or impoverished students whose life experiences have made the social and economic inequalities crystal clear. Justin, an immigrant from China who arrived in this country with his dad when he was fifteen, went to work in a restaurant owned by a relative to help with the family’s meager resources. Right away he began to experience the barriers of ethnicity, privilege, and power that Carrie and Lauren are still struggling to comprehend.

“I’m always aware of global inequalities because of my background,” says Justin. “Even at my young age, I could see how the restaurant employees struggled and toiled doing that tedious, repetitive work. Of
course, I had to do it too. It was one of those all-you-can-eat buffets, and I was the one who had to bring out the huge dishes to fill the hot and cold bars. And I had to constantly communicate with the kitchen staff, telling them what we were running low on and what we were out of, and of course the cooks were struggling to get all the stuff ready and they weren't exactly in a good mood. It was a miserable job, just bad in every way. All I could think was, 'This sucks. I hate it.' I was so young, and I was studying so hard because English is my third language, that I didn't get much further in my thinking.

"But once I got to college, I started to reflect," Justin continues. Something that really struck me was the hierarchy of employees: the owner and his family lived on the first floor of his house, the Chinese employees all lived on the second floor, and the Mexican workers were stuck in the basement. And this system was repeated in the restaurant: the owner's close relatives worked the easiest, most visible jobs—cashier, for example—while the other Chinese immigrants worked in the kitchen cooking the food, and the Mexicans were washing dishes and taking out the garbage. So I started to wonder, 'What does this mean? Why this hierarchy? And why do I have to work at this restaurant? Why does my dad have to work here? We came all the way to the U.S. for this? We are working for so many hours and never see the sunlight, while other people enjoy life!'"

Justin's experiences and his observations of other immigrant workers led him to dream of a world without borders, "a world where you don't need a passport." This thought came to him when he learned in my grassroots development class that one of the internationally recognized human rights was freedom of movement. "If we have the right to move freely within our own country, and the ability to leave and return to any country, including our own as it says in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, why shouldn't we extend this freedom to the whole world?" he wondered. "Why shouldn't anyone be allowed to cross international borders at will? Monitoring and regulating people's movements just increases the opportunities for exploitation."

Justin had learned to reflect on his experiences through his first-year writing course, which had focused on personal narrative. But aside
from a few small classes like that one, Justin was enrolled in large lecture classes—stats, psych, English lit—“like everyone else.” He might have continued on this conventional path had he not stumbled on a course that offered something called Asian American Community Service.

“I had no concept of what that class was,” Justin told me. “In China—and even in my high school here in the States—you don’t take classes about your heritage, and you don’t get credit for community service. I didn’t even intend to take the class when I showed up on the first day. But the idea of it intrigued me so I stayed.” For the service requirement in that course, Justin got involved with the Asian American Heritage Month Planning Committee. And that innocuous organization became Justin’s introduction to hands-on social justice leadership and eventually helped him achieve the status of skilled campus organizer, and from there, to a job with Teach for America in one of the most challenging communities in the country.

Like Carrie, Justin was awed and a little intimidated at first by the “big people” in the student organizations, the juniors and seniors who knew the ropes. “I would just sit there quietly in the Multicultural Student Affairs office, taking notes for the Planning Committee, watching what the others were doing, because I had no idea how organizations are run,” says Justin. “But that was the gateway that really got me started. In the summer, I actually got a job in that office. I was just a student clerk, answering the phone and filing stuff, but by talking to the staff members and student leaders who came in, I learned about all the events and issues that involved the Asian community on campus.

“So now I knew a lot of the student leaders because of my job,” Justin continues. “And in my sophomore year, I took the same job again, but now, I was involved in organizing and logistical support of Generation APA, the pan-Asian cultural show, the biggest event of the year! Since it was summer, most of the student leaders were at home, or away doing internships. But I was on campus taking classes and working, so I could see that a lot of things needed to be done, and I just sort of jumped in. I reached out and had conversations with the service-learning people about what kinds of projects we could undertake the next
year. I reached out to the Student Affairs Office and talked with people there about how to work with other student of color groups. And I took on what turned into a huge project of publishing a little magazine to send to all the entering Asian American freshmen. For that project, I had to be in touch with various organizations about funding. Then I had to communicate with the graphic designer, and the writers, and with the printing company about prices and deadlines, as well as report back to the board and the co-chairs about all I had done that week and try to get their ideas about it. And if they wanted the printing or the design to be done a certain way, I had to communicate that through different channels and sources. So I was kind of like the middle person doing all the communication from multiple sides.

“So you were learning by doing?”

“Exactly. There was no communication coach! You just had to learn from your mistakes. And I made them, for sure. The worst one, I was so worried about deadlines, I became really harsh with the printing company,” Justin laughs sheepishly. “And that really backfired. I kind of threatened them: Do this or else! Of course my supervisors and mentors jumped all over me for that, and I realized right away how wrong I was. That was a real learning experience for me.”

By this time, Justin had declared English as his major, “which was an outrageous idea at the time,” he says laughing. “It was pretty naive for an international student who can’t really speak English right, and who can’t read well or comprehend a lot of the texts. But it was pretty progressive idea, I guess!” Despite the difficulty, or maybe because of it, Justin loved the focus on reading and writing, especially after he got into U-M’s New England Literature Program, where students live cooperatively in unheated cabins in the Maine woods in early spring, studying regional authors, writing intensely, discussing everything. “NELP had an educational philosophy that really caused you to reflect on your life,” Justin says. No distractions were allowed: no cell phones, laptops, iPods, no electronics at all. “The meaning of life, the meaning of your choices, that’s what we were constantly writing and talking about. They taught me to be really conscious about why I was making certain decisions.”
"What is the purpose of life?" Justin asks rhetorically. "Most students don’t think about that when they come to college. They have a certain professional destination: medical school or law school, something really conventional, really safe, something their parents approve of and that will make them a lot of money. They know that if they apply themselves, they’re going to succeed. They know exactly how it’s going to turn out. But they don’t think about what they really want to do with their life.

"But the staff at NELP really gets you thinking about these unreflective choices," Justin continues. "They encourage you to try new things, take risks. They force you to write in different styles. If you are always using the same voice they want you to try something new. If you’re stuck in a formal, academic style of writing they want you to branch out. Or if you always write about your personal experience, they want you to change that, too. And not only in writing—I think there was one week where they forced us to do something we’d never done before. And they encouraged us to challenge them, even though they are the teachers. They said we can all learn from dialogue and open discussion, from everyone sharing their personal stories and points of view. This was a new idea for me. In China, teachers are at the top of the hierarchy. Even if they’re wrong you have to be respectful of their authority."

When Justin came back to campus for his junior year, he brought all these new skills and experiences with him. "One day in class I found myself challenging an instructor’s idea about the texts she’d chosen for discussion," he told me. "‘Why is minority writing always about victimhood?’ I asked. ‘Why is African American and Latino writing always about gang violence and social inequality? Why is Native American writing always about alcoholism and suffering? Doesn’t that just reinforce stereotypes?’ And the instructor was saying, ‘Oh, let’s not talk about it.’ Maybe she didn’t want to confront the topic. But I was like, ‘Wow, I’m like a totally new and different person!’"

With his growing confidence to ask tough questions about educational norms, Justin started looking critically at the social segregation on campus, especially in the student of color organizations. "Can you believe, there’s an African American Medical School organization, there’s the Asian Medical School students, and then they break that down into
Asian American and International Asian, and then into Chinese and Taiwanese. And then there’s a Taiwan Student Association and a Taiwanese American Student Association, which don’t really work with each other because one group speaks English and the other speaks Chinese, or as they would say, ‘Taiwanese,’ so they break it down even further! And there’s an even greater divide between East Asians and South Asians. There’s absolutely no solidarity! I thought, ‘There’s something wrong with that. No one’s working with each other, despite the fact that we all went through the same struggles as immigrants.’ And as you know, Asian students score a lot of academic achievements but we have very little political power in this country. So there’s a need for us to work together and to reach out to other groups of color. Once I understood that, I decided to join the NAACP.”

“Really!” I exclaim.

“Yeah,” laughs Justin. “I remember the first meeting I went to—I walked in and everybody was like, ‘Can I help you?’ ‘Are you in the wrong room?’ I’m pretty open-minded and outgoing, and by then I had a lot of experience working with different people, so right at that first meeting I managed to join into the conversation. And by actively volunteering to do a variety of tasks and by adding my own perspective as an immigrant and a first-generation college student, I think I contributed something. Of course I learned a lot, too, since I had no clue about African American issues before I came to this country.”

During his junior year, “a frantic time,” Justin admits, he was a resident advisor in a dormitory responsible for communicating with forty students, their parents, the director of the residence hall, and the other resident advisors. He had become the community chair for the umbrella organization for all the Asian American student organizations on campus. He was the convener of the Asian American Heritage Committee (where as a freshman, he reminded me, he was the one meekly taking notes), “responsible for recruiting people to join, convincing them to join, and convincing them to convince other people to join.” And then, just because he “wanted to do something different,” Justin looked online to find an organization that worked with immigrants and “just showed up” at one of their meetings. Migrant and Immigrant Rights Awareness
(MIRA) was a small organization, he told me, “so they welcomed me with open arms.” Soon he was working directly with Mexican immigrants, fighting for change in immigration law. He met restaurant workers in church basements and worked with student groups to provide volunteers for the cause. Many nights, after an evening packed with organizing activities, he would be up until dawn writing e-mail, making sure groups were getting funding, reaching out to other student organizations, recruiting more students to join in. “I was really, really involved,” says Justin, “and everyone in the community knew me. I reached out to a lot of university departments and offices, so I was really connected and engaged. It was hard! It was a lot of work. A crazy year. But I loved it.”

Finally, Justin, by his account, had done everything in terms of student organizations on campus and had become “a kind of advisor for other students, a role model. You have to be sure the next generation has a smooth transition into leadership positions because you’re not going to be there forever,” he says. “You’re not going to be able to do everything. You have to delegate. And there are students—like me when I was younger—who are very excited to take those responsibilities from you. And there are others who are kind of shy, but you see their potential. So you have to train them. And since you’re the one with all the connections, you have to make sure you take them around to various offices and establish those connections for them. You have to put them into a position to succeed. And that’s so rewarding! You pass on to the younger students what older ones did for you.”

I ask Justin what were the most significant things he learned in college.

“I took a lot of good classes,” he replies diplomatically. “Small classes, like yours, where you really have the freedom to think and discuss. But the real learning came from organizing with other students on campus. I think a lot of my peers have had the same experience. The biggest lesson I learned is not to get deterred. Leadership is learning by doing. And by struggling. My thing is that you have to struggle to make progress. I definitely went through that struggling phase. And year by year, I improved myself. So, as I told all my mentees, explore the possi-
abilities and jump into them with open arms. Take risks. If there's any opportunity, you should reach out for it, even though it might not appear compelling or attractive at the time. That’s really why I’m where I am right now. Because the sense of possibility took me really far. Because I just showed up. Not many people do that! Most people tend to take the safe, conventional, and prestigious opportunities. But I just jump onboard. If you show up at an NAACP meeting, people look at you like you’re crazy. But it takes these struggles for you to make progress.”

Beyond these personal challenges, Justin, like Carrie, sees authentic relationships as central to social justice leadership, though he’s less obsessed and more pragmatic about approaching them. “I think leadership starts with little things,” he tells me. “Things I learned at Michigan, mostly just through observation. Like, I hold the door for everybody.” Justin smiles at everyone, too, and his smile is so genuine that everyone gravitates to him. “I think you can’t accomplish large-scale social change if you can’t do little things to reach out to other people,” Justin says. “If you have stereotypes about other people—and who doesn’t?—if you don’t actively approach them with a smile and understanding, you’re not going to be successful. You can have the best social vision in the world, but without a genuine human connection, it’s not going to happen.”

As this generation leaves college, they expect to become leaders. But college doesn’t explicitly teach leadership, and even if it did, it is questionable whether traditional leadership models would be adequate for this generation and the world they inherit. What Justin, Carrie, Lauren, Dana, and other Millennial student leaders are trying to work out with such intense intellectual and emotional energy is a model of leadership that goes far beyond what progressive education can offer them. The components of the model are critical self-reflection, real-world argumentation, concentrated attention to detail, and research and study that is motivated not by grades and authorities but by the needs and expectations of the group and the issue itself. It involves a highly efficient group process, productive mentoring relationships, and intense, multifaceted communication across boundaries of race, class, age, gender, and authority that have been cemented in place by previous generations. For many
elite Millennials, this new, progressive leadership also requires what Dana called “critical self-creation”: recognizing one’s part in an oppressive social system, coming to terms with one’s privilege, understanding the historical reasons that barriers between groups were constructed and how they are kept in place, and developing the skill to reach across these barriers with humility, tact, and persistence. For the students who come to college with a “visceral understanding of oppression,” critical self-creation means developing the ability to reflect deeply on one’s own life, finding the courage and knowledge to speak one’s mind, and reaching out to other groups of color and trusted white allies. Above all, Millennial leadership, as these students describe it, means searching for connection, peering through artificial barriers into the heart and spirit of the other, trusting, as Carrie says, that authentic relationships between all human beings are not only important, but that they’re possible.

As progressive instructors know all too well, elite Millennial students arrive in college with lofty personal goals and the self-confidence—sometimes nascent, sometimes overweening—in their ability to change the world. Many do not rise above their hubris, and they allow their energy to be frittered away in superficial activities, anxious conformity, obsessive attention to Facebook, and plodding from one huge lecture class to another with the goal of a prestigious career. But the best, or the luckiest, find a way to develop as Millennial leaders and, in the process, as human beings.
Chapter 10

The Soul of a Great University

In 1943, Mark Van Doren, Shakespearian scholar, English professor, literary editor of *The Nation*, and Pulitzer Prize-winning poet, was asked by the Association of American Colleges to write a treatise on liberal education. The end of the war was not yet in sight, and young men had been called to battle, so undergraduate education in the nation's colleges and universities had been almost completely suspended. This pause in the educational enterprise gave scholars the opportunity to reflect on the kind of education that might someday be restored in American colleges, as it was widely believed that they had strayed from their original mission, and improvement was long overdue.¹

Van Doren's *Liberal Education* is written in the languid, expansive style of a man who is used to expounding on ideas in comfortable drawing rooms surrounded by other learned men who do not interrupt or argue with him.² He has taken a high, moral tone deliberately, he tells us, because "the mainspring of education is always somehow moral," and because he is interested in "what is good for men."³ Despite his rambling exposition, replete with references to philosophers of the past, Van Doren's idea of a liberal education is not as vague as it might seem. It
is a specific discipline, he says, with rules and an “inescapable content.”⁴ Its best practice harkens back to an earlier era, when students and teachers took the Classics more seriously, believing, as Van Doren does, that ancient literature is “the heart of what we need to know.”⁵ He laments the failure of his contemporaries to impart a love of Latin and Greek, whose study has “dwindled to a literary piddling.” Schools seem to have forgotten the reason an educated man should read them fluently: these were the languages “that were used to give an account of the world, the clearest and the grandest that we have.”⁶

In addition to the Classics, English literature and the humanities would have a central place in Van Doren’s liberal curriculum, for “poetry, story, and speculation are more than pleasant to encounter; they are indispensable if we would know ourselves as men.”⁷ Science should not be neglected, he says, despite the narrow world it inhabits and the overweening importance it accords itself. The Greeks, after all, were scientists. But they were logicians and observers of natural phenomena, surely not technicians. “By science, of course, is not meant the technological religions which now fight one another for a following,” Van Doren cautions. Science in its purest form is a method of thought that requires careful cultivation of the mind. It should therefore be included in the humanities, since “science is knowledge, and knowledge cannot be inhumane.”⁸

Van Doren’s conception of liberal education would not be complete without “training in the moral virtues,” though he admits that this task is more difficult than it was in the days of the ancient Greeks, when “philosophers could count on a quick and natural understanding of what they meant by ‘right reason’”—that is, “universal notions of right and wrong, good and bad, the becoming and the unbecoming.”⁹ At any rate, morality should not be taught deliberately, since “a consciously cultivated character is an intolerable thing”;¹⁰ rather, it should be allowed to arise naturally from rigorous intellectual training. Van Doren quotes Pascal: “Let us endeavor then to think well; this is the principle of morality”;¹¹ and Whitehead: Education is an art that may convert “the knowledge of a boy into the power of a man.”¹²

To these noble ends, Van Doren lists 110 “great books” that might comprise a liberal arts curriculum, as indeed they did at “one contem-
porary college whose entire effort is concentrated upon reading [them]”: St. John’s College in Maryland. The list draws heavily on the ancient Greek tradition, though it also calls upon many later authors: Shakespeare, Chaucer, Montaigne, and Milton; the United States Constitution, Tolstoy’s War and Peace, Darwin’s Origin of Species, Marx’s Capital, Freud’s Studies in Hysteria, Mill’s On Liberty, Bertrand Russell’s Principles of Mathematics, and of course, the Bible, in its entirely. Such great works, Van Doren assures us, “are more essential to a college than its buildings and its bells, or even perhaps its teachers; for these books are teachers from which every wise and witty man has learned what he knows.” The common possession of the experience that the great books offer would “civilize any society,” reason enough, in Van Doren’s view, to place the Classics at the center of the college experience, especially at a time when America was emerging as a world power. But in order for students to study these books well, the faculty—all of them—should know them intimately, for in the ideal college there would be no departments or specialties; every professor would teach the seminars where the books are discussed. Ideally, students and faculty should also learn the languages in which these books were written: Greek, Latin, Italian, Spanish, French, German, and Russian, as well as the languages of science and mathematics, though such extensive study, Van Doren admits, would be so formidable as to be impractical. Fortunately, excellent translations are available. “The better a book,” he assures us, “the more meaning it keeps in translation.” Such a curriculum, rigorously and sensitively applied, would mold students into cultivated men who would be ready with a quote at just the right moment in their conversations with other, similarly educated men, for “the great books are the source from which wit and humor come”; they are the “headwaters of sense, and the reference when we are wise.” And more than that: their study not only makes the man, it exalts him; he becomes a higher form of humanity, “more human than he was.” Such was the thinking about liberal education in 1943, the year I was born.

By the time I enrolled at the University of California in 1960, higher education had undergone a radical transformation. At Berkeley, Clark Kerr was presiding over what he called the “multiversity,” a sprawling
knowledge-producing complex where the ivy-shrouded undergraduate classroom that Van Doren so admired had been all but swallowed up by "institutes and ever more institutes," huge laboratories and research libraries, and ever-expanding numbers of departments, programs, and professional schools, each with their own aims, interests, courses, and specialized faculty. The multiversity was no longer a community of masters and students, directed by a single animating principle—"a soul of sorts," says Kerr; it had become radically decentralized, each part communicating only fleetingly, if at all, with the rest. The multiversity is not so much an organism as "a mechanism—a series of processes producing a series of results—a mechanism held together by administrative rules and powered by money." Kerr does not take a position on this extraordinary transformation—he speaks of it dispassionately, neither regretting nor welcoming it. In the expressionless language of the technocrats at the center of his impressive institution, Kerr tells us that the transformation of the university is "regretted by some, accepted by many, gloried in, as yet, by few. But it should be understood by all." 

The mission of this new kind of university was to "serve the needs of society" by spearheading the discovery of new ideas, new products, new techniques and processes of the kind that had served the American military so well during the war, and now would not only help the nation maintain military superiority but also power it into the future. Rather than devoting more attention to the wisdom of the past, as Van Doren had proposed, the multiversity was now focusing its vast resources on "knowledge production." New, "useful" knowledge is the most important factor in a nation's economic and social growth, says Kerr. In fact, he implies, if universities fail to produce socially and economically useful new knowledge, they are not true universities. But despite the celebration of scientific and technological progress and the intense focus on research professors and their coteries of graduate students, undergraduate education was still a priority in American colleges. The GI Bill of Rights had doubled admissions, thanks to generous government subsidies for tuition and living expenses for returning military personnel. Within a few years after the war, two million veterans had returned to school, a million and a half to colleges and universities, permanently changing the
nature and social makeup of higher education's student body. Youth—now including more women, working-class, and first-generation college students—all needed to be educated, but the opportunities to decipher the great books in their original languages had all but disappeared. The new knowledge was expanding so rapidly, and the number of college students was so vast, that the intimate seminars Van Doren had so passionately advocated were now almost entirely replaced by huge, impersonal lectures, with no time for questions and few opportunities for undergraduates to work out their ideas in discussion or in writing.

I feel no nostalgia, obviously, for the cloistered male classrooms of the past. And I have felt no need for the "great books" (though I have enjoyed many of them) to instruct me in witty remarks for cultivated company. Yet the multiversity did not suit me well either. As a young student at Berkeley, I felt alienated—not only from the massive university system but also from my own mind and heart. My discomfort, in part, was with the banking system of education: the droning lectures that professors rarely changed from year to year, the tedious internalization of the facts and specialized vocabulary of the various disciplines—though I had discovered I had a decent memory and found a sort of aesthetic pleasure in hand-copying my lecture notes to fix the "received knowledge" in my mind. But the symptoms of my malaise were closer to what physicist Arthur Zajonc felt as an undergraduate at the University of Michigan during those same years: an "unsettling disorientation and longing" for meaning and connection. Zajonc says that he was experiencing what later writers would term "the soullessness of the university that no longer views one of its tasks as offering their students an education in the meaning of life." That may have been true of me as well. But the intense focus on meaning that had characterized Van Doren's sense of a liberal education was not the answer. The life lessons that were so brilliantly elaborated in classical literature could not explain a world that had so utterly changed. Long-established power relations were shifting. Civil rights movements were challenging the racial order; labor unions were demanding equality for the working class; colonies of the "great powers" were fighting, both violently and nonviolently, for their independence. Long-established certainties about whose knowl-
edge was worthy of study by the Western elite were being challenged by those who had been trivialized and marginalized. Yet this larger conception of the world with its focus on equality among peoples and cultures, its connections between academic and real-world knowledge, and its stories of oppression and liberation had not yet entered the mind-set or practice of the multiversity, whose main concern was scientific and technological progress.

In class, my head was filled with questions I could not ask and that most professors were ill equipped to answer. Why did my History of Art textbook begin with the art and architecture of ancient Greece, when anyone who read National Geographic knew that the artistic traditions of India, China, the Middle East, and Africa were far older and at least as interesting? Why did my psychology professor take for granted that research on American male college students could illuminate universal truths about human nature? Why did historians treat oral cultures with such distain? I remember a professor who claimed that history began when people cared enough about their own past to write it down—all else was “mere anthropology.” Observing my surroundings at Berkeley led to other questions: Why was the campus overwhelmingly white? Why did so many California streets and towns have Spanish names, when one so rarely heard Spanish on the street? Why were men and women represented in more or less equal numbers as undergraduates, but women were so seldom seen in the “knowledge industry” at the graduate level? Why didn’t my course in abnormal psychology help me understand the emotional distress of the autistic children I volunteered to work with each week, or suggest any teaching techniques that might reach them? What wisdom would give me solace when the car carrying one of these children—the child sitting placidly on my lap—tumbled down an embankment, smashing the child’s skull, while I suffered barely a scratch? Such questions were not considered appropriate in classrooms where students were expected to absorb and repeat whatever new knowledge had been discovered by eminent scholars, and where any deeper meaning or connection to one’s own life were the province of one’s family or religious tradition, or left to the confusion and turmoil of one’s own mind.
Despite my agonizing questions, I found much to love about Berkeley: the riot of flowers blooming at Christmastime, the neighborhood dogs that arrived each morning to splash and bark in the campus fountain; the apparently serious attempt by someone to outfit the dogs with little pairs of shorts, an expression, in hilarious metaphor, of the prudery of the times; the long walks I would take alone in the silence of the hills above the campus; the candlelight vigils against the death penalty on the steps of Sproul Hall; my long philosophical conversations with street people—the antimaterialist, countercultural beat generation—about the nature of God, the perils of the cold war, and the reasons we should all question middle-class respectability. In one exceptional speech class that I signed up for only because I wanted to avoid the long lines for first-year English, we read and debated a short, controversial book each week—Machiavelli's *The Prince*, Freud’s *The Future of an Illusion*. For reasons that were never clear to me, this seminar was open to anyone—seniors, graduate students, freshmen like me, even street people, who could be quite interested. We wrote a lot, I remember, and we each gave one speech of our own design. The graduate student in charge of the class did not instruct us in the meaning of the texts, or tell us that our ideas needed refinement, or test us on our memory of the authors’ arguments. The purpose of the course was to hear unusual points of view, say whatever we thought, and puzzle over challenges to the standard platitudes that we found we had accepted without question. Oddly enough, our experience in this class resembled, in some sense, the Classical idea of a liberal education. As philosopher Martha Nussbaum explains, “Greek and Roman Stoic notions of an education that is ‘liberal’ [is one that] liberates the mind from the bondage of habit and custom, producing people who can function with sensitivity and alertness as citizens of the whole world.”

Such opportunities to liberate the mind within university walls were few. But outside the classroom, a nascent “free speech” movement was beginning to take shape. The animating principle at Berkeley in the early 1960s—the “soul” of the multiversity, though Kerr did not recognize it—was the atmosphere of spontaneous discussion and debate that had sprung up on the walkways that led into the campus. Impromptu
speeches would begin when someone—usually a graduate student or a member of SLATE, the political party promoting free speech on campus—stepped up onto a bench and launched into a passionate discourse on some political topic. A crowd inevitably would gather. After a while, another speaker would replace the first, sometimes to elaborate on the original point, sometimes to veer off in another direction entirely. I remember a young woman dressed in a modest pair of shorts and halter top asking the crowd if we thought it was fair that the Oakland police had picked her up, dressed as she was, for indecent exposure, and had taken her to the station house and lectured her on morality. The police were harassing women to keep them in their place, she said, just like they were harassing blacks in the South, and both were unconscionable in a free society. Such speeches would go on for hours, challenging prevailing norms, analyzing political events, and calling for radical social change. However, this liberation of the mind, especially in a leftward direction, was eventually deemed so threatening to the prevailing order that the university attempted to ban all unauthorized political activities. In the face of massive student protests, sit-ins, and the arrest of more than 800 students, Ronald Reagan, the new state governor, directed the Board of Regents to dismiss President Clark Kerr for being "too soft" on student protesters. "Liberal education" had clearly gone too far. But the Berkeley free speech experiment sparked student activism on campuses across the nation that continued for the next thirty years, taking on issues that ranged from black power, to antinuclear action, to women's liberation, to antiwar activism and environmental justice.

What are the “uses of the university,” as Kerr phrased it, as it is organized and led today? Do universities exist to create useful new knowledge that will make the nation more competitive in the global economy? Do they aim for prestige through their high-profile discoveries and “star” professors? Is their purpose to produce legions of good citizens who actively participate in public life—or at least come out to vote? Or is their tacit goal to enable their most dedicated and high-achieving students to pursue lucrative careers in their own interest? Do they aim to develop “the leaders and the best,” as the Michigan fight song goes?
Or do they simply want to make undergraduates into better thinkers and more interesting human beings during an interlude in their lives that will never come again? On the other hand, maybe higher education has abandoned its mission to educate undergraduates at all and, through an unspoken "disengagement compact" between students and faculty, has made it easy for both to get by with as little work as possible. Or, as increasing numbers of critics claim, have university campuses evolved into training camps that turn out docile workers with specialized skills, rather than critical thinkers, social critics, and more evolved human beings?

Clearly, it is not easy to discover the true aims of higher education or to discern the myriad and conflicting purposes the multiversity has taken on, much less agree about what its mission should be today. But as Van Doren notes, "Perhaps no age has thought its education good enough... Twenty-four centuries ago, in Athens itself, the mother city of our mind, Aristotle could record a prevailing uncertainty as to what education ought to be." Because all people do not agree about the upbringing of the next generation, Aristotle says, "We cannot determine with certainty to which men incline, whether to instruct a child in what will be useful to him in life, or what tends to virtue, or what is excellent; for all these things have their separate defenders." So it is in the age of the Millennial Generation.

Perhaps the twenty-first-century multiversity is by its nature so loosely strung together that it can accommodate a variety of aims and purposes. The Ann Arbor campus certainly embodies all the styles and convictions and interests that have animated higher education in the past, as well as new ones that are emerging in response to the exigencies of the economy and the habits and preferences of Millennial students. Undergraduates can choose among 200 majors or create one of their own design. They can delve into Van Doren’s "great books" in the university’s Honors program or they can decipher "new age business models" and "supply chain management" in the business school. They can specialize in a field as worldly as Actuarial and Financial Mathematics or as ethereal as Jazz and Contemplative Studies. They can prepare themselves for a career in dentistry, or pick up a certificate in elementary education or
nursing or sports management. They can intern with a researcher in neuroscience or complex systems in hopes of joining the knowledge industry, or they can choose a major that prepares them for no particular vocation—English, philosophy, Japanese, or political science. If they choose classes in economics or sociology that promote mainstream political views, they can learn to become “technicians of social control,” as Aronowitz says, “providing the scientific legitimacy for social, education, military and other areas of policy.” Or, if they are persistent and thorough enough they can root out the courses where competing ideas are taught: feminist economics, Gramscian cultural theory, studies of the African Diaspora, labor organizing. If they choose service-learning courses or small seminars they can link social and economic theory to their experience of the world and reflect on their own place in it. Or they can sit in huge impersonal lectures, like I did at Berkeley, read expensive textbooks, cram for multiple-choice tests, and improve their memories.

In addition to academics, students at Michigan, as at other multiversities, can choose from a remarkable array of extracurricular activities that have sprung up in the competition for undergraduate tuition dollars. There are hundreds of study-abroad options, opportunities to volunteer or intern, sports and games of every variety, musical, dramatic, and literary clubs, religious organizations, political parties, and social justice causes. U-M’s online “Maize Pages” lists 1,263 student organizations, ranging from Forty Days of Prayer, (“a student-led organization whose aim is to promote unity among Christians at the campus of the University of Michigan”) to the Zombie Club, whose mission is “to study and examine zombie characteristics, actions, motivation, and weaknesses in order to better understand the species in preparation for a zombie apocalypse.” No country boasts such an array of academic and extracurricular opportunities, says Harvard’s Derek Bok. “From computers to gymnasia to huge catalogues stuffed with courses, American universities vie with each other to meet virtually every legitimate desire that able young people can express.”

Even the look of the twenty-first-century multiversity reflects its multiple purposes and ever-expanding range of possibilities. At Michigan, ivy still covers the walls of the older buildings, whose tiny
dorm rooms and funky basement classrooms still exude a certain charm. Next to them are the eye-catching structures that house the business school and its luxurious accommodations for international visitors. Further on is the law school, with soaring oak trees shading a sober quadrangle, and beyond that, the squat, concrete administration buildings, rumored to still house underground bunkers where officials can protect themselves from any student demonstrators, should the need arise. Across campus are the colossal science and medical complexes, with lavishly funded, state-of-the-art laboratories concealed within their featureless exteriors. The “institutes and ever more institutes” described by Kerr in the 1960s have proliferated even further; they are everywhere now: institutes for social research, for transportation, gerontology, nanotechnology, entrepreneurial studies, women and gender, global sustainable enterprise, and hundreds more, often with the names of their successful alumni benefactors prominently displayed above their doorways.

Spiraling undergraduate tuition seems to fund much of the multiversity enterprise. “Many have long suspected that the research universities may in fact subsidize their graduate research operations with undergraduate tuition,” says Jennifer Washburn in *University Inc.* At Michigan, “tuition now accounts for 70% of the university budget.” According to a report from the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, college tuition and fees increased 439 percent from 1982 to 2007 while median family income rose 147 percent. Though parents fund their students’ education when they can, most Millennials are obliged to borrow heavily, making them “the first generation of young people to embark on adulthood in debt.” As the costs of a residential education become more prohibitive, universities are putting more of their courses online, and, according to *The Chronicle Research Services Report on the College of 2020,* “the conversion to more convenience for students will multiply over the next decade.” Students will be accessing their course material, their class discussions, their study groups, and even their professors from their cell phones and other computing devices.

The newest and perhaps most troubling feature of the multiversity is its intimate relationship with the private sector. “Universities share one
characteristic with compulsive gamblers and exiled royalty,” says Harvard’s Derek Bok. “There is never enough money to satisfy their desires.” After the collapse of the Soviet Union at the end of the 1980s, when Congress drastically cut government funds for academic “knowledge production” that helped the United States maintain military superiority, university presidents aggressively began to seek corporate investment. Today, there is no longer any clear boundary separating academia from commerce, says Washburn:

Market forces are dictating what is happening in the world of higher education as never before, causing universities to engage in commercial activities unheard of in academia a mere generation ago. Universities now routinely operate complex patenting and licensing operations to market their faculty’s inventions (extracting royalty income and other profits and fees in return). They invest their endowment money in risky start-up firms founded by their professors. They run their own industrial parks, venture capital funds, and for-profit companies. ... The question of who owns academic research has grown increasingly contentious, as the openness and sharing that once characterized university life has given way to a new proprietary culture more akin to the business world.

One might think this move toward the commercialization of higher education, as Bok puts it, would have little impact on the lives of undergraduates, whose living, learning, and social activities take place far from the corporate board rooms and academic offices where these relationships are forged. But undergraduate education suffers from these new arrangements in countless ways. Since the days of Kerr’s multiversity, when cold war research had become so highly valued, professors in science and business—and, increasingly, in tenure-track positions in any department—not only have been generously compensated but also have been relieved of any expectations to teach undergraduates or to teach them well. Between 1963, when Kerr first described the multiversity, and 1994, when he reflected on his tenure as president, the teaching hours of the research faculty had decreased by about half while their pay had increased dramatically. The highest prestige is now accorded to full professors who snag the largest grants, publish the most papers, and forge the strongest connections with industry. Young tenure-track faculty devote their days and nights to research and writing—standard requirements for advancement—while excellence in
teaching is seen as irrelevant or even as a liability. When teaching is neither fully recognized nor appropriately rewarded, there is little incentive for faculty to improve it. "How to escape the cruel paradox that a superior faculty results in an inferior concern for undergraduate teaching is one of our more pressing problems," said Kerr in 1963. That issue has become only more critical today.

Administrators, too, have allowed universities to "drift away from an undergraduate instructional focus," replacing full-time professors with part-time instructors, and diverting resources toward nonacademic functions, including their own salaries. "Cost containment" provides the rationale for devaluing undergraduate education. "The application of accounting principles to academic employment and planning is perhaps the most blatant indication that higher education is going corporate," says Aronowitz. Although graduate student instructors and non-tenure-track faculty often make highly effective and inspiring teachers, according to both student and administrator evaluations, they are poorly compensated (at Michigan, they often earn less than local high school teachers), and endure job instability and continual cutbacks in benefits, despite the ever-increasing undergraduate tuition. In addition, the traditional mainstays of liberal education—philosophy, languages, literature, and the social sciences—are declining while fields that make money, study money, or attract money are flourishing. The result, say education critics Andrew Hacker and Claudia Dreifus, is that "higher education has lost track of its original and enduring purpose: to challenge the minds and imaginations of this nation's young people, to expand their understanding of the world, and thus of themselves....Campuses have become preserves for adult careers," and professors, administrators, and even presidents "have used ostensible centers of learning to pursue their own interests and enjoyments."

Some critics go even further, charging that American higher education is now characterized by "limited or no learning for a large proportion of students." According to a study of the data collected on more than 2,300 students across a wide array of campuses who participated in the Collegiate Learning Assessment, a "state of the art" measure of student learning, three semesters of college have a "barely noticeable impact" on students' critical thinking, analytical reasoning, problem
solving, and writing.\textsuperscript{45} skills that are highly valued among the nation's employers. Today's students are studying dramatically less, yet their reduced effort has "little impact on their grade point averages,"\textsuperscript{47} and this, say the authors, has grave consequences for U.S. standing in the global economy. Even if one does not think that the purpose of higher education should be about maintaining world dominance, the meager intellectual gains many students make after four or five years of college can still be disappointing. Learning, says Stanley Aronowitz in \textit{The Knowledge Factory}, "is the process by which a student is motivated to participate in, even challenge, established intellectual authority." The problem is not that U.S. students have lost their edge in science and mathematics; by allowing the university to turn into a "knowledge factory" we have declined the opportunity to creatively rethink the social and economic systems that produce inequality. "Possibilities for genuine social and cultural as much as scientific innovation depend, not on following others," Aronowitz says, "but on the formation of an autonomous self, capable of finding its own voice."\textsuperscript{48}

All these criticisms suggest we should look closely at the essential purpose of higher education today, especially at the nation's multiversities. Should their mission simply comprise the vague conglomeration of interests, specialties, "client services," and opportunities for profit that the university enterprise has become? While this would at least be an honest statement of the status quo, it does not reflect the kind of commitment to education and intellectual discovery that we should expect from a great institution. To be sure, it is hard to rein in the complex "mechanism" that has characterized higher education since it began changing so drastically in the mid-twentieth century. The multiversity, Kerr said in 1963, "has demonstrated how adaptive it can be to new opportunities for creativity; how responsive to money; how eagerly it can play a new and useful role; how fast it can change while pretending that nothing has happened at all; how fast it can neglect some of its ancient virtues."\textsuperscript{49} This disturbing statement, which has become an even more accurate description of higher education today, suggests we should consider revisiting the idea of an animating principle that might hold the sprawling complex together and infuse it with meaning.
There is nothing inherently wrong with universities serving multiple purposes. "Knowledge production" can be tremendously exciting and animating, and connecting undergraduate and graduate students with the exploration of new and difficult intellectual questions at the highest levels can set standards for superior achievement as well as help support inventions and creative ideas that might truly benefit society. For those who come to college for a wider-ranging intellectual exploration under the guidance of devoted faculty and advisors, the multiversity can provide an outstanding "liberal education" in the arts and humanities. And since so many students from modest backgrounds aspire to a college degree—a virtual requirement for any job that can support a family these days—many students and their parents prefer specialized training that leads straight to a respectable career; they may not see the value of challenging authority or becoming an autonomous intellect or a "citizen of the whole world" when such nebulous goals do not connect students directly with the job market.

The problem is not that all these functions have become housed in the nation's universities; rather, it is that the sheer size of multiversities and their unruly competition for prestige and profit have resulted in the exploitation of students, the lowering of educational standards, and the diversion of research and development from "serving the public good" to serving the interests of the privileged few. Without a way to hold the institution together, or to remind it of its potential as a collection of human intelligence and talent that could elevate rather than exploit society, the problems will only increase in the years ahead.

When Kerr first described the multiversity, he noted this lack of "glue" as a major difference from the small, sheltered communities of masters and students of the past. "A community should have a soul, a single animating principle," he says, but the multiversity can only be held together by its president, who is not always up to the task. Kerr described the role of the head of a multiversity as a "mediator," although the term seemed to confuse people, since it suggested "unprincipled compromise." "I wish I had used a different word with different public connotations," Kerr said, "political leader, or community leader, or campus statesman, or unifier, or peacekeeper, or chief persuader, or cri-
sis manager, or agent of integration—anything but mediator." The
term had led to no end of trouble, both with the activist students who
felt Kerr was conceding too much to the demands of the state, and with
the administration and the governor, who thought the opposite.

In his reflection written in 1972, Kerr elaborates on his own sense of
the word "mediator" and the need for that role in balancing the compet­
ing aims of the multiversity's various constituents: "The tone should
have been conveyed of active leadership, of statesmanlike solutions, of
holding the campus together against internal and external attacks, of
keeping the peace as against disruption, of using ideas and principles to
bind the ties, of relying on persuasion rather than on force, of seeking
consent rather than governing by fiat, of being the guardian of reason
in debate, decency in human relations and sanity in action, of meshing
together the discordant elements into a productive entity."

As Kerr struggles to convey the skills needed to keep the multiver­
sity under some semblance of control, he compares his role with that of
the Clerk of a Quaker Meeting: "The person who keeps the business
moving, draws forth ideas, seeks 'the sense of the Meeting.'" But Kerr,
himself a Quaker, does not explain what "the sense of the Meeting"
means, or where it comes from, or what seeking it does for the body as
a whole. In fact, Kerr doesn't mention the most distinguishing feature
of the Religious Society of Friends, which is that meetings, either for wor­
ship, or for conducting the business of the institution, or for committee
work, are all held together by a single animating principle, that there is
'that of God'—or that of the spirit, or the light—in every human being.
By concentrating on that spirit, on the humanness of each individual, one
is able, ideally, to hear conflicting ideas and opinions without rancor, and
to make humane decisions in concert. In Quaker Meetings, as in
Quakerism generally, there are no rules, no beliefs that members must
attest to, no formal hierarchy, no pastor or preacher or any other "head"
that can be called upon to settle disputes quickly and firmly. As a Quaker
myself, and as a committee convener and activist member, I can attest
that Quaker decision making and dispute resolution can be frustrating
and time consuming and can call upon all of one's reserves of patience.
But the successful practice of discerning the group's common feeling,
spiritual insight, and intellectual position—"the sense of the Meeting"—allows Quaker Meetings to bring together the most intellectually diverse and independent-minded individuals to make deeply considered decisions despite their differences. Without that connection between people, without the conscious and continual practice of spiritual insight and clarity, Quaker Meetings could not function—or perhaps they would turn into a town hall meeting, or a session of Congress, or, indeed, a multiversity: a collection of individual ideas, interests, and political positions, all tugging at each other, "students versus faculty, humanists versus scientists, younger versus older faculty members . . . a Tower of Babel partially falling apart rather than being held loosely together."55 As Kerr said of his university during the turmoil of the 1960s, "a narrow barrier of tolerance stood between peace and war . . . and when tolerance was gone, what had been unbroken peace became intermittent warfare."56

Obviously, the multiversity is not a religious institution, nor do I believe it should become one. But I do think it can be animated by a unifying principle that calls on the highest human aspirations and capabilities of all its members. Because of my experience with Quaker process, I believe it is possible for a multiversity to retain its hugely diverse and dynamic character, yet find a soul or animating principle that helps clarify its priorities and infuse its research and teaching with a larger purpose. Mission statements of large research institutions often mention that one of their primary responsibilities is to "serve society," or "promote the public welfare," or that the institution was established "for the benefit of mankind." But what if the university were to ask itself, "Which society are we serving? How much of society? How far does 'society' extend? Who benefits, and who suffers from our leadership, from our advanced knowledge, and from the ideas and inventions that we produce, preserve, and convey to the world?"

As human society advances, by fits and starts, toward respect for multiple forms of knowledge and equitable, dignified sharing among all people, the multiversity should aspire to lead in this direction rather than resist and lag behind. But such leadership would require us to know "who and what we are for, and who and what we are against," as Freire says. We would need to take a stand in favor of all the world's peoples,
not just the ones who are most "like us," whether they be white Protestant males, as in Van Doren's day, or "the people who care enough about their own history to write it down," or the people whose creative genius has made them wealthy at the expense of the most vulnerable, or whose life of privilege has blinded them to suffering.

Once the university knew who and what it was for, and who and what it was against, its priorities would fall more naturally into place. With the mission of undoing inequality, oppression, exclusion, and injustice animating the soul of the university, its research, theory building, teaching, even its fund-raising and profit-making activities would incline more naturally toward a broader conception of the public good. We could not continue to pretend that the university excels in teaching while the majority of its undergraduates still sit in huge, impersonal lectures given by underpaid, undervalued faculty. We would consider small classes of the utmost importance for students at all levels, since it is there that they are most likely to engage deeply with ideas, explore complex social problems, question their own assumptions and prejudices, and find their own voice. We would consider a thorough understanding of race and class dynamics to be essential knowledge for all our students, whatever their majors or professional aspirations. We would foreground history from the point of view of the oppressed and excluded, and expect this history to be a vital component of our students' understanding of social and economic inequality. We would do more, consciously and programmatically, to bring the "periphery" of Millennial students who "care about humans in the abstract" into the smaller "core" who are beginning to understand structural forms of injustice and develop their own visions of a fairer world. We would provide students with significant intellectual, social, and cultural training in how to interact "in dialogue, hope, humility and sympathy" with people in oppressed communities before we send them out into the world. We would offer ample opportunities for them to disconnect from their personal technology, read and write with patience and care, ask themselves difficult questions, and reflect on the meaning of human suffering, including their own. In the end, the multiversity would agree with Van Doren that "the mainspring of education is always somehow moral"
and that with deeply considered, critical education, students are capable of becoming "more fully human": wiser, more generous, more compassionate, more inclined to cooperate peacefully as equals, more able to withstand the storms of their inner life. As Paulo Freire, I am sure, would agree, a multiversity unified by a deep concern for social justice would prepare our Millennia! students for their highest vocation: to work for a world of greater equality between peoples, a more just order among nations, "a world in which it will be easier to love."

Notes

2. Indeed, Van Doren mentions that he discussed these ideas in conversations with such luminaries as Mortimer Adler, Jacques Barzun, Joseph Wood Krutch, Lionel Trilling, and many others (ix).
4. Ibid., viii.
5. Ibid., 44.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., 51.
8. Ibid., 54.
9. Ibid., 59.
10. Ibid., 61.
11. Ibid., 63.
12. Ibid., 66.
13. Ibid., 149-50.
14. Ibid., 148. Van Doren acknowledges that the list is not necessarily complete and that it will need to be revised frequently.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid., 153-54.
17. Ibid., 156.
18. Ibid., 17.
20. Ibid., 1. In "Reconsiderations after the Revolts," written in 1972, Kerr complains that his message had been misunderstood; he was only describing and analyzing the multiversity, not approving or defending it (111).
22. Returning servicemen and women of color, however, benefitted little from this kind of affirmative action, since most colleges in the 1940s did not accept racial minorities on principle (Katznelson, 2006).
25. Ibid., 54.
29. Van Doren, 2-3.
33. LEO Matters, 2011.
34. Lewin, 2008.
35. Hacker & Dreifus, 238.
37. Ibid., 9.
38. Washburn, xi-xii.
40. Kerr, 142.
41. Ibid., 49.
42. Arum & Roksa, 11-12.
44. Hacker & Dreifus, 8-9.
45. Arum & Roksa, 30.
46. Ibid., 35.
47. Ibid., 3-4.
48. Ibid., 144.
49. Kerr, 34.
50. Ibid., 15.
51. Ibid., 107.
52. Ibid., 108.
53. Ibid.
54. Ibid., 29.
55. Ibid., 98.
56. Ibid.