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Showcasing and analyzing media for social justice, democracy and civil society

Youth as E-Citizens:

Engaging the Digital Generation

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Chapter 1

Engaging the Digital Generation

The growth of the Internet has dramatically altered the ways in which individuals use the media, and youth are at the forefront of these changes. “Generation Y,” the nearly 60 million individuals born after 1979, represents the largest generation of young people in the nation’s history, and the first to grow up in a world saturated with networks of information, digital devices, and the promise of perpetual connectivity.¹ Although teens overall spend less time online than do adults (for a variety of reasons, including busy school and after-school schedules and the need to share Internet access with others), they are much more involved in the interactive and communications aspects of the Internet.²

According to a 2001 study by the Pew Internet and American Life Project, for example, among Internet users, teens far exceed adults in their use of instant messaging (74 percent of online teens as opposed to 44 percent of online adults), visits to chat rooms (55 percent to 26 percent), and playing or downloading games (66 percent to 34 percent).³ In another study of Internet use by young people, a third of college students regarded themselves as “Internet dependent,” and another one-fourth described themselves as “cybergeeks.”⁴ As one industry trade publication put it, “teens and college-age young adults ... have not just adopted online technology ... [they] have internalized it.”⁵ In perhaps the clearest indication of a fundamental shift in media consumption patterns, a July 2003 survey of teenagers and young adults revealed that for the first time, this age group spent more time on the Internet each week than watching television.⁶

Youth are more than just consumers of digital content; they are also active participants and creators of this new media culture, developing content themselves, designing personal websites, and launching their own online enterprises.⁷ The proliferation of youth-created Web pages and message-board postings, and the popularity of instant messaging among young people all contribute to the booming use of the digital media for communication among youth.

Young people are also a lucrative target market. A recent study of online youth (roughly three-quarters of the total youth population)⁸ revealed that the 8-to-21-year-old segment spends some \$172 billion annually.⁹ Their immersion in new media, combined with their spending power, has placed youth at the center of a powerful digital marketing enterprise. “Online youth are no longer a segment,” observes John Geraci, vice president of youth research at Harris Interactive. “... [T]hey have become the mainstream.”¹⁰ Accordingly, marketers spend huge sums of money to research this important demographic group, hiring psychologists, sociologists, and anthropologists to study their emotions, habits, and values. Already, a host of new products is being created essentially for youth, who frequently serve as the test market for the next generation of digital content and services. Their passion for communication is fueling the development of new handheld, wireless products that are designed primarily for instant messaging and chat, but which also feature interactive gaming, Internet access, digital picture and music storage, and personal information man-

agement.¹¹ “Kids drive technology today,” observes Anne Cohen Kiel, an anthropologist hired by Microsoft to study the use of technology by teens. “By meeting their needs, we meet everyone’s needs.”¹²

As the Center for Media Education’s 2001 analysis of online teen content revealed, a compelling if highly commercialized digital culture now offers a variety of engaging, interactive activities, much of it designed specifically for the youth audience. Even as online companies struggle to find workable revenue models in the wake of the dot-com crash, marketing and advertising are already fundamentally shaping the digital culture, creating new hybrid forms that blend communications, content, and commerce. As a result, advertising, shopping, “branding,” and market research comprise a dominant and pervasive presence in the online teen landscape.¹³

While Internet commerce has focused much of its attention on tapping into the lucrative youth market, public debate over the Internet and youth has been dominated by a concern about the darker side of online behavior. Throughout the 1990s, fears about pornography, predation, and other Internet dangers prompted Congress to pass several laws to regulate cyberspace, most of which were successfully challenged in the courts by civil liberties groups.¹⁴ The Commission on Online Child Protection, created with the passage of the Child Online Protection Act of 1998, studied a wide range of protective technologies and methods, including filtering and blocking services, labeling and rating systems, and the possibility of online “green spaces” containing only child-appropriate materials.¹⁵ More recently, the controversy over the illegal downloading of music by young people has captured the attention of press and policymakers alike. Several bills were introduced in Congress in mid-2003 to reduce illegal downloading, including a measure that would make it a crime punishable by up to six months

in jail to put a copyrighted song on the Internet so others could share it. Another bill would require the FBI to work more closely with local police, Internet service providers, and entertainment industry officials to crack down on illegal downloads, all in an effort to stop millions of Americans from downloading free music from the Web.¹⁶

Against the backdrop of a rampant online consumer culture on the one hand, and the public obsession over Internet harms on the other, a quite distinct development has quietly been unfolding. Scarcely audible amidst the hubbub over piracy and pornography and the clamor of the media marketplace, a low-profile civic upsurge—created for and sometimes by young people—has been taking root on the Net. Hundreds of websites have been created to encourage and facilitate youth civic engagement, part of an emerging genre on the Internet that could loosely be called “youth civic culture.” Although fragmented and rarely in the foreground of the rapidly expanding new-media culture, this nascent online civic sector is nonetheless a noteworthy development.

Many of these websites have sprung up over the past several years, when the rapid growth of the World Wide Web transformed the Internet into a much more user-friendly medium. Most arose from the existing nonprofit associations, institutions, and organizations that make up civil society, although a few grew out of private-sector initiatives, government programs, cross-sector collaborations, and individual efforts. They range from small, locally based efforts (e.g., YouthLink, of Hampton, Va., <http://www.yl-va.org/>) to large-scale, national programs (e.g., Youth Service America, <http://www.ysa.org>). A few are entirely virtual, made possible by the technology that enables an individual or group to establish an extensive presence online, even in the absence of a bricks-and-mortar base of operations (e.g.

YouthNOISE, <http://www.youthnoise.com>). Others reflect the efforts of long-standing, real-world fixtures that only in recent years have added online components to their programs for youth (e.g., the YMCA, <http://www.ymca.net>). Still other sites span international borders and overcome language and cultural barriers, drawing youth from around the world into online projects and discussions (e.g., Voices of Youth, <http://www.unicef.org/voy/>, and iEARN, <http://www.earn.org>).

The purpose of this report is to shed light on this little-known online youth civic culture. It is based on a two-year study conducted by the staff of the Center for Media Education.¹⁷ We had several goals in mind in developing this research project. One was simply to document the existence of youth civic content and activity on the Web, describing and categorizing what we found. Such an overview should serve, we believe, to highlight and showcase aspects of the new digital media culture that have received little research or public attention. Given the dynamic and ephemeral nature of the Internet, moreover, we thought it important to take a picture of what is taking place at this time on the Web, mapping, in a sense, the online youth civic sector.

Another goal was to examine the various ways the civic sector is taking advantage of the special features of the Internet and digital communication, and to explore how these features might play a role in the larger goal of fostering civic engagement. We were also interested in identifying the challenges confronting the youth civic online community, key trends, and the broader issues arising from the evolution of the Internet.

Finally, we wanted to explore whether these little-understood civic and political Internet-based activities by youth could help reverse declines in civic and political engagement. Although actually measuring the impact of the civic web on youth was beyond the scope of our study, we

conceived our research from the outset as an effort to help reframe the public debate about media and youth. Rather than focusing on simply protecting youth from the harms of new media, we hope to build on the view that our media system should *serve* young people, providing them with resources—including opportunities to participate in the production of civic content itself—that can help them develop into competent and responsible citizens. We see the present research as laying the groundwork, then, for a formulation of practice and policy in pursuit of that larger goal.

Assessment of Civic and Political Engagement

By traditional measurements, at least, youth today are less engaged in “civic affairs” than previous generations. “The last three decades have been ones of precipitous decline in the civic health of our nation,” according to a report produced by the Pew Internet and American Life Project in September 2000. “Whether measured by participation in community affairs, voter turnout, trust in institutions or people, the quality of public discourse, or attention to and knowledge of public affairs, Americans appear increasingly disconnected from each other and from public life.”¹⁸ Nowhere is this truer than among young people:

- Over a 25-year span, the national rate of voter participation experienced a 9 percent drop among all age groups, but double that—an 18 percent decrease—for voters ages 18-24.¹⁹
- A “continuing pattern of decline in interpersonal trust” has emerged in our society, with the youth generation displaying the least social trust. Asked if “most of the time, people are just looking out for themselves,” 70 percent of people 15 to 25 years old agreed, compared to 59 percent of Generation X’ers, 49

percent of Baby Boomers, and 40 percent of older adults.²⁰

- According to the Tarrance Group, a Republican strategic research and polling firm, “Young Americans have only a limited, vague understanding of what it means to be a citizen in a democratic society.... Most young people subscribe to abstract statements about the importance of ‘being an American’ (78 percent) and ‘being a good American who cares about the good of the country’ (65 percent),” the report explains. But while “youth identify with the specific rights associated with citizenship, [they] have only vague ideas about the public responsibilities.”²¹
- A 2003 report by Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) noted that young people are not only less likely to vote, but are less interested in political discussion and public issues than either their older counterparts or young people of past decades.²²

Michael Delli Carpini summed it up this way: “Put simply, America’s youth appear to be disconnecting from public life, and doing so at a rate that is greater than for any other age group.”²³ Today’s young adults, he explains, are

- less trusting of government and of fellow citizens...;
- less interested in politics or public affairs...;
- less likely to feel a sense of identity, pride, or obligation associated with American citizenship...;
- less knowledgeable about the substance and processes of politics...;
- less likely to read a newspaper or watch the news...;
- less likely to register or vote...;
- less likely to participate in politics beyond voting...; and

- less likely to participate in community programs designed to address public problems through collective action or the formal policy process.²⁴

This “participation gap” between young and old is far greater today than in the past, Delli Carpini observed, concluding that “the current civic malaise that has engulfed America’s youth appears to be an ingrained generational characteristic rather than a stage in the life cycle that will remedy itself with time.”²⁵

These are clear indicators of civic disengagement, and they are worrisome. Yet when viewed with a more nuanced eye, young people’s engagement with their communities, their nation, and the world is revealed to be a more intricate checkerboard of involvement and disconnect, caring and indifference, ignorance and savvy. Young people *do* care about many civic issues; they simply choose to respond differently from adults. According to a Harris Interactive survey on civic engagement conducted on behalf of Do Something (<http://www.dosomething.org>) in July 2001, young people feel strongly about a number of topics that are central to their lives, including “drunk driving, depression and teen suicide, guns at school, improving schools, discrimination, violence in schools, and drugs.”²⁶ Fully two-thirds of those surveyed, moreover, indicated that

they were likely to get involved in the issues they viewed as important—getting involved with other people their age to help others, volunteering with an existing group and doing things online. However, they were least likely to say that they would call, write or visit an elected official to ask for help on the issue.²⁷

The following year, another Harris Interactive poll revealed similar concerns among the youth surveyed. Additionally, perhaps in response to homeland security and the domestic war on ter-

rorism, “three-quarters of teens (74%) felt that individual rights and freedoms were extremely or very important to them.”²⁸

These findings were confirmed more recently in a detailed report entitled *The Civic and Political Health of the Nation: A Generational Portrait*, published by CIRCLE in September 2002. Based on a telephone survey of over 3,000 respondents, the study found that civic engagement and electoral participation function independently of each other in many people, young as well as old. The study defined citizens as “civically engaged” if they participated in at least two of the following activities:

- volunteering for an organization other than a candidate or political party;
- working with others to solve a community problem in the past year;
- raising money for a charity, including participation in a walk, run or bike-a-thon fundraiser; and
- actively participating in a group or association.

Its poll of four age cohorts found, by those criteria, that 32 percent of the overall population was civically engaged. Young people 15 to 25 years old ranked lower but not by much (28 percent engaged), and in fact ranked higher than older adults (25 percent).²⁹

Electoral participation was defined by a separate yardstick:

- “always” voting (or, for youth under 20 who had not yet had that opportunity, intending always to vote);
- volunteering for a candidate or political party;
- attempting to persuade someone else how to vote;
- displaying a button, bumper sticker or sign on behalf of a candidate; and

- contributing money to a party or candidate in the past 12 months.

Again, the study considered people to be electorally engaged if they participated in two or more of these activities. The results: just over a third of the population polled met this standard (36 percent), but young people lagged further behind (26 percent).³⁰ In short, younger cohorts trail their elders in attentiveness to public affairs and in electoral participation, but hold their own in community-related and volunteer activities and in activities that give voice to their concerns. Despite the apparent reassurance in the observation that young people do not differ so dramatically from older generations, the study also came to the conclusion that over half of those 15 to 25 were *disengaged* from either civic or electoral activity.³¹

The lack of interest in elections, politics, and policy-making is troubling. While young people may be concerned about social problems and want to help, they may be removing themselves from the binding decisions about what paths society should take—and what resources it should apply—to find and enact solutions. In the words of Elizabeth Hollander, young people “have not made the essential connection between community service and political participation.”³²

The Developing Citizen

The period between the ages of 15 and 22 is the critical time when young people are developing the “civic identities” they will take with them into adult life.³³ As scholars Constance Flanagan and Nakesha Faison have pointed out, “the civic identities, political views, and values of young people are rooted in their social relations and in the opportunities they have for civic practice.”³⁴ Flanagan and Faison identify several key attributes required for civic engagement. They define *civic*

literacy as “knowledge about community affairs, political issues and the processes whereby citizens affect change, and how one could become informed if they were not already.” *Civic skills* are those skills that assist in achieving group goals, such as active listening and perspective-taking, and leadership skills such as public speaking, contacting public officials, and organizing meetings. *Civic attachment* is “an affective or emotional connection to the community or polity.” Such attachment creates a feeling that “one matters, has a voice and a stake in public affairs, and wants to be a contributing member of the community.”³⁵

Scholars in the field of positive youth development have identified an even broader set of capacities that young people need to develop in order “to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood through a coordinated, progressive series of activities and experiences which help them to become socially, morally, emotionally, physically, and cognitively competent.”³⁶ As Reed Larson explains, “A central question of youth development is how to get adolescents’ fires lit, how to have them develop the complex of dispositions and skills needed to take charge of their lives.”³⁷ For Larson, one of the key attributes is *initiative*, which he believes “is a core requirement for other components of positive development, such as creativity, leadership, altruism, and civic engagement.”³⁸

Many social scientists have sought the factors that can lead young people into fuller, more active participation as citizens. Numerous elements have been identified: parental involvement, the presence of role models, civics classes in school, active political discussion in the classroom or the home, and experiences sustained over an arc of time, all appear to make a positive difference.³⁹ Now, as this study indicates, it may be time to add the Internet to the list.

The Internet’s Civic Potential

Experts in the field of youth civic engagement have begun to look at the role that the Internet might be playing in the civic and political life of youth, especially since this is the cohort growing up with this new medium. A 1999 study found, for example, that while young people remain much less likely to seek out political information than older cohorts, when they do they are more likely to use the Internet as their preferred means of access.⁴⁰ Michael Delli Carpini has identified several features of the Internet that suggest its potential as a key tool in addressing the root causes of declining youth civic engagement, stressing the “supply side” characteristics of the Internet as an unparalleled content-delivery platform. The new media environment, he points out, increases the speed with which information can be gathered and transmitted. It also increases the volume of information that is easily accessible, and creates greater flexibility in how and when information is accessed. And in comparison to traditional, print and broadcast systems, the Internet provides much greater opportunity to interact with others in a range of contexts (one to one, one to many, many to one, and many to many), using a variety of media types (text, audio, and video). As a result, the Internet both shifts the nature of community from geographic to interest-based, and challenges traditional definitions of information gatekeepers and authoritative voices, of content producers and consumers.⁴¹ Having wrought all of these changes in our media system, the Internet has the *potential*, Delli Carpini believes, to affect the motivation, ability, and opportunity of youth to become engaged in public life.⁴²

The *demand* side of the equation, however—the extent to which youth themselves actively seek online civic information and involvement—is another matter. Delli Carpini suggests that the Internet may be most useful in expanding the ac-

tivities and civic involvement of youth *already engaged* in civic life. “To the extent that the Internet can reach this segment of the youth population, provide information on how to translate this interest into action, and provide relatively easy, attractive ways to do so,” he observes,

it is possible that some percentage of this group could become more engaged. For example, technologies such as Web TV allow people who view a show on homelessness or school violence to easily connect to sites that can provide additional information and specific ways to act, and to do so at the moment they are most likely to be motivated. And a number of environmental groups have used an approach called “viral campaigning” in which mass and chain emails are sent to Internet users informing them about a particular issue or policy and providing easy ways for interested citizens to contact the appropriate officeholder or government agency to voice their opinions. In short, the Internet and related technologies provide new ways for tapping existing interest in particular issues and using this interest to motivate and facilitate action.⁴³

Even mainstream political affairs, from the original online campaign calling for Congress to censure President Clinton and “move on,” to Howard Dean’s celebrated weblog, reflect younger citizens’ disdain for politics as usual in favor of more efficient, interactive online communications.⁴⁴

The use of technology to reach those who have evinced little interest in civic affairs may be considerably more challenging, however. “The most difficult group to reach are those who are neither engaged nor clearly motivated,” Delli Carpini acknowledges. “Since motivation (interest, attention, efficacy and so forth) is the *sine qua non* of participation, the question is whether the Internet can be a useful means for increasing these attributes among young adults.”⁴⁵ Although Delli Carpini offers examples of popular culture (e.g., MTV and the “Party of Five” television show) bearing civic messages, “the ability of new technologies to increase the motivation to act,” he

concedes, “appears to be the least well-theorized and understood aspect of the potential for increasing civic engagement.”⁴⁶

The Democratic Net

From its earliest incarnation as a “network of networks,” constantly bringing new voices into an ever-widening circle of discussion, the Internet has had a basic democratic thrust.⁴⁷ And even with the privatization of the network in the early 1990s, and the rampant commercialization that followed, the vision of the Internet as the quintessential “people’s network” has never completely faded. It should come as no surprise, then, that there has been considerable discussion and debate during the past decade about the Internet’s potential to reverse the decline in civic participation. The early boosters of the new online culture wrote glowingly of its democratizing capabilities (although others have dismissed such claims as more rhetorical than real). In a 1994 document entitled “Cyberspace and the American Dream: A Magna Carta for the Knowledge Age,” for example, Esther Dyson, George Gilder, George Keyworth, and Alvin Toffler sketched the outlines of a new digital democracy. The online world, they predicted, “...will play an important role in knitting together the diverse communities of tomorrow, facilitating the creation of ‘electronic neighborhoods’ bound together not by geography but by shared interests.”⁴⁸ Douglas Schuler, one of the pioneers in the civic networking field, has argued that online community networks have “...immense potential for increasing participation in civic affairs, a potential far greater than that offered by traditional media such as newspapers, radio, or television.”⁴⁹

Numerous websites have been created to facilitate civic dialogue and action. Sites exist to provide electoral information, to promote discussion of vital issues, to offer news, essays, and lesson

plans, to link people to resources, both online and off, and to promote civic education, civil society, and community participation. The Seattle Community Network (<http://www.scn.org>), Davis Community Network (<http://www.dcn.davis.ca.us>), Blacksburg Electronic Village (<http://www.bev.net>), Democracy Network (<http://www.democracynet.org>), Minnesota E-Democracy (<http://www.e-democracy.org>), and Web White and Blue (<http://www.webwhiteblue.org>) are only a few of the hundreds of examples. To date, however, there has been little effort to organize a critical mass of this material into a coherent, clearly marked online civic sector.

According to a survey on “Online Communities” conducted by the Pew Internet & American Life Project,

... the online world is a vibrant social universe where many Internet users enjoy serious and satisfying contact with online communities. These online groups are made up of those who share passions, beliefs, hobbies, or lifestyles. ... All in all, 84 percent of Internet users have at one time or another contacted an online group.

Youth are at the heart of this new communitarianism, according to the report, which

showed that many Americans are using the Internet to intensify their connection to their local community. They employ email to plan church meetings, arrange neighborhood gatherings, and petition local politicians. They use the Web to find out about local merchants, get community news, and check out area fraternal organizations. Moreover, there is evidence that this kind of community engagement is particularly appealing to young adults.⁵⁰

The report noted that young adults often discover local religious groups, youth activities, social clubs, and community organizations *online* and subsequently seek association with them *offline*.⁵¹

Whether the relationships forged in online communities translate into the same kind of social capital as those forged offline, however, is still unclear. William Galston has observed, “Online groups are paradigmatic examples of voluntary community—whence the enthusiasm they have aroused in many quarters.”⁵² But as Galston also points out, “Others doubt that the kinds of social ties likely to develop on the Internet can be adequate substitutes—practically or emotionally—for the traditional ties they purport to replace.”⁵³ Among those doubters is Stephen Doheny-Farina, who believes that online groups

... flourish where individuals need not depend on others for much beyond companionship in their leisure lives. As individuals rely more on national and global ties than on local ties, the need for complex, integrated communities—collectivities of interdependent public and private lives—is replaced by the need for isolated individuals to bond through lifestyle enclaves, which provide only the *sense* of community.⁵⁴

In this very early period of the new digital media culture, many questions remain about whether the Internet will be able to play a significant role in revitalizing civic participation in the United States. An important step in that direction is to assess what efforts are currently underway that could lay the groundwork for the future. This is what we set out to do in examining the current state of the youth civic Web.

Study Design and Intent

Our study was designed to provide a broad, descriptive overview of a range of Web-based civic efforts by and for youth. Its intent is to present a picture of the current online youth civic landscape, focusing not only on website content, but also on the organizations and institutions creating that content. In addition to undertaking a broad overview of youth civic activity on the

Internet, we also conducted more detailed analyses of selected issues and projects, including several case studies of individual websites, for which we conducted in-depth interviews with the sites' developers.⁵⁵

We realized at the outset that this type of research would not be easy. Indeed, before we began our study, some of our colleagues warned us that we were setting out to undertake an impossible task. The Internet is so vast that it is impossible to grasp its full scope or plumb its depths. Unlike traditional print or broadcast media, with their discrete editions and programs, the Internet is in a constant state of flux. Websites can change very rapidly; their content can be altered, they can "morph" into other kinds of sites, or they can disappear altogether. We devised a number of strategies for addressing these challenges, for seeking out online youth civic enterprises, developing clear definitions for what we would and would not include in our examination. (Our methodology is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.) We supplemented our qualitative analysis with some attempts to quantify certain features we encountered in many of the youth civic websites. The sites reviewed for this study, finally, were not intended to be a representative, randomly selected sample. Nor does our study promise to encompass the entire landscape of online media. Rather, our effort was to provide a description and analysis of the *nature* of online youth civic content. Also, although the Web is a global medium, we restricted most of our analysis to the content and services based in the U.S.

We believe that we have captured a reasonably accurate picture of the overall trends in this quickly changing environment. And although there were obviously parts of the new online youth civic culture that we were not able to look at closely, we believe we have provided a sufficiently wide-angle view of what is taking place on the Internet to stimulate subsequent, more de-

tailed studies. While we tried to provide the most up-to-date descriptions of the content of the websites examined in our study, in some instances revisiting them numerous times to assess their evolution, this process can never be complete. Such is the ephemeral and dynamic nature of the Web. In the following pages, we present the findings of our study, providing what we believe to be a rich and detailed picture of a variety of efforts currently underway on the World Wide Web. In Chapter 2, we describe the "lay of the land" in the online civic landscape, providing an overview of the kinds of organizations and individuals that have created these efforts, their various goals and missions, and the ways in which they seek to engage young people in civic activities. Drawing from our examination of over 400 youth civic websites, and our structured analysis of more than 300, we provide detailed descriptions of representative sites within ten categories of civic activity, ranging from volunteering to political activism.

Chapter 3 provides a comparative case study of two highly significant but very different websites, YouthNOISE and WireTap. Based on in-depth interviews with the developers of these two projects, the chapter presents a narrative history of both, examining in detail their origins, their intended goals, the challenges they face, and the strategies they employ to reach and engage young people in civic and political activities.

Chapter 4 examines Generation Y's use of the Internet in response to the September 11 terrorist attacks. We document the waves of utilization, from an initial outpouring of emotion, to facilitation of volunteering, to news coverage, analysis, and debate. We also look at message boards as a forum for youth response. In a time of fear and emotion, unmediated youth expression sometimes flared into harsh and inflammatory speech. But at its best, the Internet facilitated serious civic discourse. To illustrate this

potential, we analyze the small-group online discussions conducted by Global Kids in its digital project, “Everything After: A 9-11 Youth Circle.”

Chapter 5 explores the emerging role of the Internet as a tool for youth activism. The Web has become a fundamental component of many social action projects. Political causes and issue campaigns now rely on a powerful and versatile set of digital tools, altering the character, style, and effectiveness of activism. We examine the ways that youth activists are adapting old techniques to the digital medium, and developing new techniques that are possible only online. In the process, we profile two youth activist groups, United Students Against Sweatshops and Peacefire.

Becoming civically engaged requires that a person hold a specific set of interests and feelings, knowledge, and skills. Can civic websites help youth develop these attributes? In chapter 6, we seek to apply the lessons garnered from political science, youth development, and youth civic engagement to the online efforts that our report has documented. We look especially at practices that contribute to civic literacy, skills, and affect. We also examine the models of citizenship presented in websites, recognizing that, implicitly or explicitly, they mold the vision of what a young citizen’s role in society ought to be.

Major technological changes are transforming the Internet in ways that will have profound implications for the future. With the introduction of high-speed “broadband” technologies that deliver both audio and video, the Internet is taking on many of the features of television. The merging of television and the Internet into one seamless package of services will very likely represent the standard communications appliance in American homes. The advantages of this new technology, however, may be more than offset by “walled gardens” of proprietary, heavily commercial content, by increasingly concentrated ownership of the media, and

by the shrinking of the public domain. Will young people still find “civic space” on the Internet in ten years? Technology, regulation, and public policy are the focus of Chapter 7.

Having mapped, categorized, dissected, and analyzed several hundred youth civic websites, in our final chapter we step back to ponder some of the larger questions that have emerged. Among them: How can youth civic websites best apply the interactivity that lies at the heart of the Internet? How can nonprofit organizations—the major producers of these sites—reach youth with more potent civic messages? If we think civic websites can increase civic engagement, can their impact be measured? We conclude with a series of recommendations, both for further study and for maximizing the use and the effectiveness of the wealth of civic content for youth that can be found online.

Notes

¹ Ellen Neuborne and Kathleen Kerwin, “Generation Y,” *Business Week* 15 Feb. 1999: 81-84 ff.

² Lee Rainie and Dan Packel, *More Online, Doing More* (Washington, DC: Pew Internet & American Life Project, Feb. 2001). Recent data indicate that teens spend less time online than adults (303 vs. 728 minutes per month). “Although teens are early adopters and tend to experiment with new and innovative online products, winning their time and attention is becoming increasingly difficult.... Jupiter’s analysts believe that the low Internet use by teens is attributed to teens’ active schedules, with school and after-school activities; necessity of sharing online time at home with other family members; and the perception of the Internet largely as an entertainment and communication tool, not as a productivity tool.” Jupiter Communication, “Teen Spend Less Than Half As Much Time Online As Adults,” 12 Sept. 2000, <http://www.jup.com/company/pressrelease.jsp?doc+pr0009127> (10 May 2001).

³ Amanda Lenhart, Lee Rainie, and Oliver Lewis, *Teenage Life Online: The Rise of the Instant-Message Generation and the Internet’s Impact on Friendship and Family Relationships* (Washington, DC: Pew Internet and American Life Project, 2001): 37.

⁴ Cyberatlas, "US College Students Use Net for Shopping," 8 Aug. 2001, http://www.cyberatlas.internet.com/big_picture/demographics/article/0,,5901_432631,00.html#table (3 Sept. 2001).

⁵ Youth Markets ALERT, Sept. 1999.

⁶ "Youth Spend More Time on Web than TV—Study," Reuters, 24 July 2003, <http://www.forbes.com/technology/newswire/2003/07/24/rtr1037488.html> (4 Dec. 2003).

⁷ Rochelle Sharp, "Teen Moguls: Internet-savvy Kids Are Turning Their Fun and Games Into Million-Dollar Businesses," *Business Week* 29 May 2000: 108-118; Austin Bunn, "The Rise of the Teen Guru," *Brill's Content* July/Aug. 2000: 64-69, 123-129.

⁸ Mary Madden, *America's Online Pursuits: The changing picture of who's online and what they do*, (Washington, DC: Pew Internet and American Life Project, Dec. 2003): 2, 3, 18. The study found "more than three-quarters" of younger teens (between the ages of 12 and 17) using the Internet. Older teens were analyzed with the age group of 18- to 29-year-olds; of these, fully 83 percent went online in 2003.

⁹ Masha Geller, "Study: Gen Y Spends \$172 Billion," MediaPost, 4 Sept. 2003, http://www.mediapost.com/dtls_dsp_news.cfm?newsID=217495&newsDate=09/04/2003 (15 Dec. 2003).

¹⁰ Quoted in Harris Interactive, "US Online Youth Spend \$164 Billion Annually."

¹¹ "Look Who's Communicating," *Family PC* Sept. 2000: 50.

¹² Quoted in Rana Foroohar, "Listening to the Kids," *Newsweek International* 25 Aug. 2003.

¹³ Center for Media Education, *TeenSites.com: A Field Guide to the New Digital Landscape* (Washington, D.C.: CME, 2001): 15-57.

¹⁴ Lynn Voedisch, "You Must be 18 to Enter," CNN.com, 17 Jan. 2000, <http://www.cnn.com/2000/TECH/computing/01/17/are.you.18.idg/index.html> (4 Dec. 2003).

¹⁵ COPA Commission, "Final Report of the COPA Commission, Presented to Congress, October 20, 2000," <http://www.copacommission.org/report/> (3 Dec. 2003).

¹⁶ "Fight over Free Music on Web Coming to Congress," *USA Today*, 9 Sept. 2003, http://www.usatoday.com/tech/news/techpolicy/2003-09-08-riaa-congress_x.htm (3 Dec. 2003).

¹⁷ The work on this study began as a project at the Center for Media Education. It was funded in its first year by CIRCLE, the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement. Supplemental support was provided by the Ford Foundation and the Surdna Foundation. In September 2003, the project was moved to the Center for Social Media, School of Communication, American University, where it was completed.

¹⁸ Michael X. Delli Carpini, "The Youth Engagement Initiative Strategy Paper," Pew Charitable Trusts, Sept. 2000, http://www.pewtrusts.com/misc_html/pp_youth_strategy_paper.cfm (10 Sept. 2000).

¹⁹ The Ad Council, "Voting—Youth Civic Engagement," http://www.adcouncil.org/research/wga/youth_civic_engagement/?issue1Menu (4 Dec. 2003).

²⁰ Scott Keeter, Cliff Zukin, Molly Andolina, Krista Jenkins, *The Civic and Political Health of the Nation: A Generational Portrait*, CIRCLE, 19 Sept. 2002: 39, http://www.pewtrusts.com/pdf/public_policy_youth_civic_political_health.pdf (13 July 2003).

²¹ The Tarrance Group and Lake, Snell, Perry & Associates, *New Millennium Project Part I: American Youth Attitudes on Politics, Citizenship, Government and Voting*, (Alexandria, VA: Tarrance Group, 1999), <http://www.tarrance.com/nass/execsum.asp> (7 Aug. 2001).

²² CIRCLE and the Carnegie Corporation of New York, *The Civic Mission of Schools*, (New York: Carnegie Corporation, 2003), <http://www.civicmissionofschools.org/> (4 Dec. 2003): 4.

²³ Michael X. Delli Carpini, "Gen.com: Youth, Civic Engagement, and the New Information Environment," Working Paper, <http://www.jsisartsci.washington.edu/programs/cwesuw/carpini.htm> (8 Aug. 2001).

²⁴ Delli Carpini, "Gen.com."

²⁵ Delli Carpini, "Gen.com."

²⁶ Dana Markow, "Editorial: Our Take on It," *Trends and Tudes* 2 (July 2003): 2-4.

²⁷ Markow, 3.

²⁸ Markow, 3.

²⁹ Keeter, et al, 24.

³⁰ Keeter, et al, 5.

³¹ Keeter, et al, 24.

³² Elizabeth Hollander, "Disengaged Youth, What's a Politician to Do?" Brown University News Service, 18 Aug. 2000, http://www.brown.edu/Administration/News_Bureau/2000-01/00-011.html (9 Sept. 2001).

³³ Delli Carpini, "The Youth Engagement Initiative Strategy Paper," 10.

³⁴ Constance A. Flanagan and Nakesha Faison, "Youth Civic Development: Implications of Research for Social Policy and Programs," *Social Policy Report* 15.1 (2001): 4.

³⁵ Flanagan and Faison, 3.

³⁶ According to the National Youth Development Information Center, "youth development addresses the broader developmental needs of youth, in contrast to deficit-based

models which focus solely on youth problems.” Core youth development concepts include “importance of self-directed learning, the development of critical thinking skills and social skills, the promotion of values such as fairness, tolerance, and honesty, and the importance of inclusive environments. In addition, the youth development model allows for youth to actively define their own goals and work in cooperation with others to achieve them, and must have opportunities to participate in deliberative discourse.” <http://www.nydic.org/devdef.html> (6 June 2000).

³⁷ Reed W. Larson, “Toward a Psychology of Positive Youth Development,” *American Psychologist* 55.1 (2000): 170.

³⁸ Larson, 170.

³⁹ These factors have been identified and analyzed by a number of scholars, including the aforementioned Larson, Flanagan and Faison; and Jack M. McLeod, “Media and Civic Socialization of Youth,” *Journal of Adolescent Health* 27.2 (2000). Some of these points are also cited in *The Civic Mission of Schools*.

⁴⁰ Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000): 169.

⁴¹ Delli Carpini, “Gen.com.”

⁴² Delli Carpini, “Gen.com.”

⁴³ Delli Carpini, “Gen.com.”

⁴⁴ For examples of the early “Censure and Move On” campaign literature, see <http://www.wholeo.net/Catalog/moveOn/Moveon.org.htm> (5 Dec. 2003). Presidential candidate Howard Dean’s online resources are considerable, including “Blog for America” (<http://www.blogforamerica.com/>), the official Howard Dean Weblog, and a separate Generation Dean site (<http://generationdean.com/>), designed to appeal to younger supporters, with its own GenDean Blog (<http://www.gendeanblog.com/>).

⁴⁵ Delli Carpini, “Gen.com.”

⁴⁶ According to Delli Carpini, “One might argue that the same approaches used to translate existing interest into action could be used to increase interest itself. For example, Web TV provides the possibility of an audience for a popular TV show (for example “Party of Five”) in which an episode addresses a social issue like violence in schools to both become more interested in the issue and link easily to sites that provide ways to act. Similarly, email campaigns can target non-political communities of interest (say those interested in fishing or hiking), connect these recreational interests to more political ones (for example, the degradation of marine habitats, coral reefs, or national forests), and then provide ways for converting this new interest into action.” Delli Carpini, “Gen.com.”

⁴⁷ Nowhere is the Internet’s democratic character more evident than in its Usenet discussion groups, the original store-and-forward e-mail exchanges that date back to the Internet’s earliest days. “In its simplest form,” observes Usenet historian Michael Hauben, “Usenet represents democracy.” Michael Hauben, “The Social Forces Behind the Development of Usenet,” in Ronda and Michael Hauben, *Netizens: An Anthology*, <http://www.columbia.edu/~rh120/> (3 May 2003).

⁴⁸ Esther Dyson, George Gilder, George Keyworth, and Alvin Toffler, “Cyberspace and the American Dream: A Magna Carta for the Knowledge Age,” *Release 1.2*, 22 Aug. 1994.

⁴⁹ Douglas Schuler, *New Community Networks: Wired for Change* (New York: ACM Press, 1996): 25.

⁵⁰ John B. Horrigan, *Online Communities: Networks that Nurture Long-distance Relationships and Local Ties* (Washington, DC: Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2001): 2.

⁵¹ Nearly one quarter of a group the Pew study identifies as “Net-joiners”—“people who find groups on the Internet, then become members”—are younger adults between the ages of 18 and 24. Among “Net-joiners” who are “local groupies”—individuals who “belong to a group with some connection to the community where they live”—15 percent interact with a religious group, 14 percent with a local youth group, 11 percent with a local social clubs or charitable organization, 10 percent with a neighborhood group or community organization, and 10 percent with a local sports league. John B. Horrigan, *Online Communities*.

⁵² William A. Galston, “(How) Does The Internet Affect Community?” in Elaine Ciulla Kamarck and Joseph S. Nye, Jr., eds., *Democracy.com? Governance in a Networked World* (Hollis, NH: Hollis Publishing Co., 1999): 59.

⁵³ Galston, “(How) Does The Internet Affect Community?” 48.

⁵⁴ Stephen Doheny-Farina, *The Wired Neighborhood* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996): 50.

⁵⁵ In developing the design for this study, we have drawn from our experiences in several previous research projects on Internet content we conducted while at the Center for Media Education (CME). Our study of alcohol and tobacco marketing on the Web, for example, combined an examination of websites promoting or advertising these products with an analysis of the emerging institutions of advertising and marketing in the digital media. Wendy Swallow Williams, Kathryn Montgomery, and Shelly Pasnik, *Alcohol and Tobacco on the Web: New Threats to Youth* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Media Education, 1997). CME’s 2001 study of teen content on the Web, *TeenSites.com: A Field Guide to the New Digital Landscape*, employed a similar approach.

Chapter 2

Mapping the Online Youth Civic Landscape

The past several years have witnessed dramatic growth in civic content on the Internet. The non-profit sector has been a key player in this growth; after gradually establishing an online presence over the last half of the 1990s, the number of non-profit websites increased dramatically in 1999, as did their sophistication. According to a report by the Kellogg Foundation,

... a classic Internet explosion began with dozens of interactive and service-oriented websites going live.... [T]hese new online entities were not just organizational websites offering 'brochureware' about the host organization. In fact, they were innovative online tools for increasing organizational effectiveness, as well as finding information and people.¹

In a survey of over 1,000 nonprofit organizations conducted by Network for Good and the Bridgespan Group, virtually all of the respondents either had a website or planned to add one in 2003.²

This proliferation of nonprofit websites has spawned a new generation of civic content tailored to the needs and interests of youth. Our earlier study of teen online content found evidence of this emerging, though fragile, youth civic culture.³ We found sites that invite youth to consider the serious issues of our time, and that allow a diversity of voices to be heard. They position young people as assets to society, as creators of serious content, and as powerful agents of change for the common good. Because most of these sites are noncommercial in nature, freedom

from the profit motive can allow them to make unique contributions to the public conversation. At the same time, many of the sites are trying to come up with strategies for sustainability. They are going through a period of experimentation with content, formats, and business models in order to attain viability.

For this report, we conducted an investigation of online civic content for teens and young adults. Our study identified more than 400 "youth civic websites" and analyzed 300 of them systematically. We included sites in this study in accordance with their adherence to two criteria. First, sites needed to address civic topics, broadly defined. And second, they needed to speak directly to youth. On the surface, both criteria sound relatively simple. In practice, neither one was.

The meaning of "civic" websites

The term "civic" invites interpretation. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "civic" as meaning "1. Of, pertaining, or proper to citizens; 2. Of, or pertaining to a city, borough, or municipality; 3. Of or pertaining to citizenship; 4. As civic-minded, inclined to concern oneself with civic affairs; public-spirited."⁴ Those definitions do not serve very well a project looking at young people in the United States today. These young people may or may not be legal citizens of the United States; their scope of action may run far beyond that of a local community; and the civic concerns they address may extend beyond national bound-

aries to encompass the needs of people around the globe. While the term “public-spirited” certainly seems appropriate for engaged young people, it hardly serves as a definition.

Slightly more useful is the same dictionary’s listing of “civil,” which is defined as “1. Of or belonging to citizens”—not useful for the reasons listed above, but also “2. Of or pertaining to the whole body or community of citizens; pertaining to the organization and internal affairs of the body politic, or state.” Here, the invocation of the “whole body or community” comes closer to the mark. The Center for Civic Education reinforces that interpretation and provides a useful distinction between civic and private life:

Civic life is the public life of the citizen concerned with the affairs of the community and nation, that is, the public realm. Private life, by comparison, is the personal life of the individual devoted to the pursuit of private interests.⁵

Our use of the term “civic” refers to this “public realm” and “the whole body or community of citizens.” It focuses on the active participation by community members in the exercise of public authority, the rights and responsibilities of community members, and the ways they work with one another as well as the ways they relate to government. Where websites address public issues from the standpoint of the individual—for example, websites that address youth obesity by counseling young people on individually making healthier dietary choices—we did not classify them as civic. We did consider to be civic a website that encouraged young people to take action against cigarette sales, as it chose to recommend group actions designed to benefit the community as a whole.

On the definition of civic activity, Benjamin Barber notes that

Citizenship is, at its best, a full-time job. It means taking ongoing responsibility for all of the com-

munities in which you live: your family, your neighborhood, your church, your school, your synagogue, the town, the state, the nation, and of course increasingly now we talk about a genuine responsibility to the whole globe environmentally as well.... And that means much more than just voting, maybe doing jury duty once in a while. Citizenship is in a certain sense a full-time occupation.... It’s a work that is not discharged by voting—people think somehow “Now I’ve been a good citizen, I voted, now I can go home again.” But voting is the *first* step towards citizenship, not the last step.⁶

As does Barber, our study of youth civic engagement deliberately extends its definition of civic activity beyond voting. It encompasses websites that discuss public policy issues and act on them through such means as volunteering, community “mapping,” and political activism.

Robert Putnam makes the point that “civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a dense network of reciprocal social relations. A society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital.”⁷ In this spirit, our study focuses on work conducted by groups of people working together. In fact, learning to work with others underlies many of the “civic skills” that websites try to teach young people for their development as citizens.

Finally, our definition of civic activity encompasses the notion of “the public good,” which is expressed by the National Civic League in the following terms:

The end result of a community’s civic education activities should be to engender within the community’s residents a commitment to participating in the betterment of that community.... [This] must also... include an attachment to justice, a willingness to serve beyond self-interest, an openness to all those who share the rank of citizen, and a perspective that reaches beyond the generation living to those unborn.⁸

Thus, the notion of the public good implies a commitment to justice and to the rights of those

who are marginalized. Activities that are designed to harm, diminish, or exclude others, or deprive them of their rights, are not civic activities, even when conducted in the public realm by groups of active citizens. For that reason, anti-gay websites were excluded from the study, while websites designed to include gays and lesbians as full citizens and to extend rights and protections to them were included.

The meaning of “youth” websites

The second criterion by which we screened websites was whether they spoke directly to youth. Our study chose to examine solely those websites that addressed young people directly, as an explicit target audience. We did so, knowing full well that young people seeking civic engagement can and undoubtedly do choose to access websites designed for a general audience or for adults. However, an examination of sites that target youth enabled us to focus on this part of youth digital culture, examining the role these websites assume as promoters of youth civic engagement. Among the questions this allowed us to raise are the following:

- What do these websites attempt to contribute to the civic literacy, civic skills and civic affect of young people?
- What forms of action and engagement do the websites propose as appropriate to young people as emerging citizens?
- To what extent, and how, do youth-focused websites encourage youth initiative and youth voice?

To guide us in determining which websites meet this criterion, we analyzed the content of three established websites that we knew to target youth populations specifically: YouthNOISE,

YouthVote2000, and YouthActivism.com. We identified several characteristics that typified these sites and that seemed designed to attract and address young people. From these we developed the following list of characteristics that helped guide us in site selection:

Primary indicators:

- The site’s mission statement or “About” statement identifies youth as a target audience.
- The site relates its civic content explicitly to young people’s concerns, experiences, and involvement.
- The site presents actions that young people can take and encourages youth engagement.
- The site uses language that refers to young people in the first- or second-person “we” or “you,” as opposed to referring to youth in the third-person “they.” Youth voice is distinguished from that of children or adults.

Secondary indicators:

- Site content highlights the involvement of young people. It portrays youth participation in pictures and text.
- The site’s name includes the term “youth.”
- The site uses language and visuals that reflect popular youth culture. Visually, this may include color, animation, graffiti-style typefaces, and pop culture images. Language may include informal tone, slang, and email-style abbreviations.

The first four of these criteria were considered most important in establishing whether a site was designed for a youth audience. A signifi-

cant number of sites speak about youth civic engagement, but are addressed to educators, academics, or parents. These sites were not included in our study.⁹

Site Selection and Analysis

We utilized a variety of methods for finding youth civic websites. We drew, initially, on the research we conducted for *Teensites.com*, CME's earlier report on Web content designed for young people.¹⁰ While that study concentrated on commercial content, it also drew our attention to sites dedicated to promoting civic engagement. As is typical on the Web, many of those sites offered links to other sites with similar missions, which in turn linked us to others. In the same manner, our interviews with site creators also brought up the names of relevant sites. Online research, however, was the primary means of locating online youth civic content, especially the use of search engines.¹¹ We uncovered additional civic material, much of it relevant to our study, through the use of youth-specific portals such as Yahoo!ligan! and through directories.¹² Some civic content was located in unique places. We found, for example, that the Idealist.org website, known as a source for non-profit job and volunteer listings, is a gold mine of listings for youth civic sites. Other volunteer portals are similarly fruitful.

Once sites were identified, data collection and analysis were conducted by a team of full-time CME staff, assisted by graduate and undergraduate students. Most of our analysis is qualitative and descriptive in nature, with the primary goal of rendering as accurate and vivid a portrait as possible. We returned to some of the sites months after our initial observations in an effort to keep our data up-to-date, though we were not able to do so in most cases. We selected a few dozen websites for closer, more in-depth

examination, focusing on those we considered “emblematic” of certain trends or features of online civic culture.

We supplemented our descriptive work with a questionnaire-based quantitative analysis of various kinds of website content. Because of the complexities of applying social science methods to the study of Web content, we designed this part of the study not to provide a precise measure of what we found, but rather to give a sense of the range and distribution of certain features within the body of websites we examined. As we integrate some of this data into the following discussion, we will often use general terms—“the majority,” “over half,” “roughly a third”—so as to emphasize the imprecise nature of the quantified findings. We also found the coding of content useful in developing the categories we use for classifying the websites.

What's out there?

Exploration of the online youth civic “landscape” reveals the richness and variety of voluntary organizations seeking to engage young people. We found that the websites of widely recognized youth-serving nonprofits and organizations such as Girl Scouts or Habitat for Humanity comprise only a small segment of the online civic terrain. Thousands of lesser-known nonprofit organizations—local, national, and international—now reach youth via the Internet. While most of the websites we examined were created by nonprofit organizations (just over half of the sites we surveyed), civic content is also produced by educational institutions (about one in ten), commercial ventures (one in twenty), government entities (just over one in twenty), and youth themselves—although these represented a tiny fraction.¹³

These sites address a wide range of issues, including voting, voluntarism, racism and tolerance, public health, social activism, and, most recently, patriotism, terrorism and military conflict, to name only a few. In many instances, particular sites address multiple topics. Many of the surveyed sites invoke in their mission statements the broad goals of civic engagement or of positive youth development. The following goals are most commonly cited:

- promoting knowledge about a particular issue or set of issues (three-quarters of the websites surveyed);
- promoting youth voice or empowerment of youth as members of society (three-quarters of the websites surveyed);
- promoting the skills necessary for youth to promote and engender change (two-thirds of the websites surveyed);
- promoting civic attachment, social trust, or community building (slightly more than half the websites surveyed);
- promoting team building or leadership skills (almost half the websites surveyed).

Some civic sites are aimed at a broad youth audience, while others are tailored to more specific communities, such as minority youth, under-served youth, youth in urban or rural areas, or youth of various racial, ethnic, or sexual identities. Nine out of ten of the websites surveyed addressed both male and female populations. Tiny proportions—under three percent in each case—specifically addressed an ethnic, racial, immigrant, or sexual minority population. Although most online ventures are rooted in pre-existing organizations and institutions, a few have no offline presence at all; they are solely creatures of the digital universe.

How civic websites appeal to youth

Nonprofits that reach out directly to young people through the Internet employ a variety of means to attract young audiences:

- designing youth-specific website pages;
- featuring issues specific to young people or that young people have shown passion for;
- shaping activities in ways that accommodate young people (e.g., forms of involvement that young people can engage in after school hours or online);
- using language and graphics that reflect commercial youth culture;
- affording opportunities for young people to speak their minds, utilizing the unique tools of the digital world: posting articles, poems and works of art to websites, discussing issues online via message boards and chat rooms, registering their opinion on polls and questionnaires, sending electronic letters to legislators, corporations, and newspapers, etc.;
- allowing youth to determine what topics will be addressed online.

In the process of engaging their audiences, youth civic websites have adopted new, innovative forms of online civic participation. “Closed-circle” discussions, limited to a small number of participants and a short duration of time, allow participants to get to know each other and deepen the frankness of discussion while offsetting the tendency toward “drive-by” comments and “flaming.” (This promising form is described at length in Chapter 4.) Online games are also emerging as a way to inform and engage a wider population, especially young men, on civic topics that they may otherwise dismiss as dull.

“Pre-engagement” as a necessary stage

Not all the content we examined reflects full-blown civic engagement; after all, reading about a civic topic is a far cry from acting on it. However, we are concerned with the process of initially engaging young people. In order for them to act, something must first grab their attention, pique their interest in the civic world (or even awaken them to its existence). Only then can they be motivated to assume a more active role. Thus, as a prerequisite to active engagement, youth need to be persuaded that public affairs and governance are relevant to them, and that they as young people have both a stake and a voice in the civic realm (i.e., “civic attachment”). They also need to become informed about civic topics (i.e., develop “civic literacy”).¹⁴ Finally, they need to acquire appropriate behaviors and capabilities that will facilitate their ability to act in the civic arena (i.e., “civic skills”).

These attributes (discussed at greater length in Chapter 6) can all be acquired; what is required is a developmental process of civic education and growth. Thus, while some youth civic websites may call for something less than hands-on participation, they provide fundamental first steps that set youth on the road to a future of active, informed engagement.

Youth civic engagement: ten categories

We examined online youth civic activity in the following ten categories:

- 1) **Volunteering:** A large number of youth websites link young people to opportunities to volunteer, either “live” or through “virtual volunteering,” which allows people to share their skills via the Internet.
- 2) **Voting:** Responding directly to the decline in youth voter turnout, some websites build interest in voting and facilitate voter registration.
- 3) **Youth Philanthropy:** The Internet is increasingly used as a channel for making charitable donations, or for learning about the practice of philanthropy.
- 4) **Engagement with the Local Community:** A large number of below-the-radar websites connect young people to civic activities, resources, and organizations in the communities where they live.
- 5) **Global Issues and International Understanding:** The Internet can bridge distance and language barriers, allowing young people around the world to link up in collaborative online discussions and projects.
- 6) **Online Youth Journalism and Media Production:** From alternative news reporting to online arts projects and documentaries, youth are using the Web to analyze and comment on the world.
- 7) **Access and Equity:** Some local sites, often the product of community technology centers, address the inequities of the “digital divide.” Many involve low-income youth in projects that combine training in media skills with community-based action.
- 8) **Tolerance and Diversity:** Youth websites in this category strengthen respect for diversity within our multicultural society, addressing the divisions caused by race, ethnicity, religion, and sexual preference.
- 9) **Positive Youth Development:** In both traditional “character-building” programs and assets-based “positive youth development,” many organizations prepare young people for

the challenges of adolescence and adulthood. They use the Internet to expand their visibility and, increasingly, to provide resources and activities.

10) Youth Activism: Since the WTO protests in Seattle in 1999, websites have become a critical tool for youth activists. Electronic networking and information-sharing help them offset the challenges of small numbers, geographical dispersion, and inadequate funding.

Many youth civic sites reflect several of these themes simultaneously. This is in part because these categories represent, not genres of websites, but types of civic engagement. Nor is this an exhaustive list. While these categories capture a wide swath of the civic youth landscape, they by no means represent the full range of civic activity online.

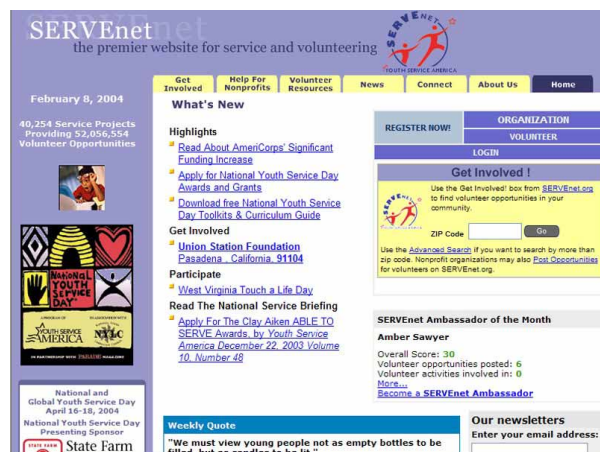
Rather, we grouped websites to reflect the most commonly occurring forms of civic engagement we encountered.¹⁵ We also featured the forms of activity most facilitated by the Internet.

Thus, in addition to voting, volunteering and philanthropy—traditional indicators of civic engagement—we added such Internet-dependent activities as online journalism and global collaboration. In the following pages, we walk the reader through the online youth civic landscape, visiting each of these categories and providing a brief description of representative sites. Given how unfamiliar this terrain is likely to be to many readers, we also provide commentary on many of the sites. As with any guidebook, we hope our assessments are useful to those who may want to visit the sites themselves.

1) Volunteering

Research indicates that voluntary community service expands young people's horizons, increases their understanding of differences and their support of diversity, and enhances their educational experiences by bringing the community into the classroom.¹⁶ Nearly half of American young people believe that volunteering for community activities is important, and most who do, act on this belief: In 2002, 40 percent of youth and young adults donated time to a group.¹⁷

Given those statistics, it's not surprising that fully one-third of the websites we surveyed provide opportunities for, or links to, volunteer activity. Some simply invite young people to volunteer with the organization that posted the site. Others are portals through which young people can access volunteer opportunities



SERVENet

in hundreds of nonprofit organizations—local, national, or even international.

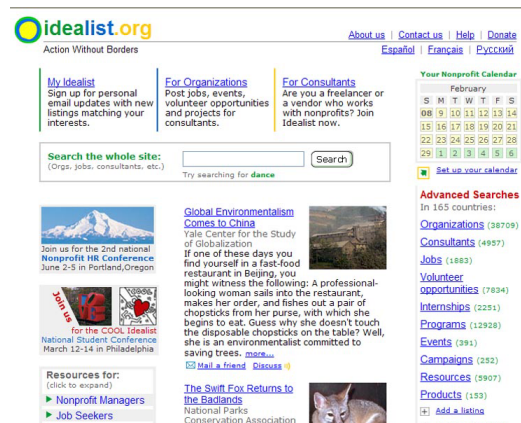
SERVENet (<http://www.servenet.org>), created by Youth Service America (<http://www.ysa.org>), is one of the premier portals for finding volunteer opportunities. The site is easy to use: Site visitors enter their ZIP code or city and state, then specify their skills (33 to choose from, ranging from clerical to companionship, first aid to four-wheel drive), interests, target population, and availability. Within seconds, an array of relevant organizations seeking volunteers appears on the screen. A single mouse click takes the user to a Web page where details are provided on the selected organization and its needs. Unfortunately, many of the volunteer opportunities are not geared to

young people, and may require a degree of availability (for example, during school hours) or specialized skills that make them ill-adapted for youth.

SERVEnet's other resources include searchable listings for job openings in the nonprofit sector; links to online donation sites; and a "Virtual Volunteering" section (listing volunteer activities carried out via the Internet, including editing translating, tutoring and mentoring). SERVENet's "Volunteer Resource" section includes "101 Ways to Make a Difference in Your Community," a virtual bookstore, articles on "Good News about Youth," statistics and trends on youth service, and helpful links (41 domestic, 28 international). The site also offers extensive online tools and resources for nonprofit organizations.

This array of resources is stellar, as is the multitude of volunteer openings offered on the site. But SERVENet remains first and foremost a volunteering site. In contrast, another volunteering portal, Idealist (<http://www.idealist.org>), presents a fuller panorama of civic engagement options. Idealist is a project of Action Without Borders, a nonprofit organization that seeks to "find practical solutions to social and environmental problems, in a spirit of generosity and mutual respect."¹⁸

Like SERVENet, Idealist offers a large searchable database where users can seek out volunteer opportunities by ZIP code and interest; provides information on a range of service-related topics; and offers a free e-newsletter. Where Idealist distinguishes itself is in its offering of a special section, "Idealist Kids & Teens" (<http://www.idealist.org/kt>). This section features volunteer opportunities that are explicitly open to kids and/or teens. It provides 46 interest areas to choose from, with volunteer openings around the world.



Idealist

Besides volunteer slots geared to this age group, Idealist Kids & Teens encourages young people to start their own projects to address local problems. The site's "Organizations Started by Kids" page (<http://www.idealist.org/kt/youthorgs.html#sec11>) provides short descriptions of nineteen organizations founded by young people; projects range from donations of toys, toiletries, baby food, and bibles for homeless people, to a program that uses technology to improve education and opportunities for youth around the world. The "Take the lead" section (<http://www.idealist.org/kt/activism.html>) offers how-to guidance on moving from idea, to project, to results. It describes dozens of organizations in the world of youth leadership and community involvement and recommends possible sources of funding.

"The World Around You" (<http://www.idealist.org/kt/ktorgsearch.html#SEC8>) introduces young people to organizations dealing with a dozen issues, ranging from nature and animals, to government and politics, to theater and expression. Many offer Web pages especially for teens or children. In short, Idealist "Kids & Teens" provides youth not only with information and opportunities for participation, but with encouragement, models, and tools for designing and launching their own projects. In so doing,

the site promotes initiative, organizational skills, and creativity, and makes an important philosophical statement: that serving as a volunteer is only a starting point for engaging with society.

In addition to these two major portals, there are literally scores of other sites devoted to youth volunteering and community service. Some, such as Habitat for Humanity (<http://www.habitat.org/>) and the Points of Light Foundation (<http://www.pointsoflight.org/>) include special youth sections: Habitat's Campus Chapters and Youth Programs (<http://www.habitat.org/ccyp>), and Points of Light Youth (<http://www.pointsoflight.org/forvolunteer/youth.cfm>).

One of the most interesting developments in the online volunteering world is “virtual volunteering.” This modern-day volunteering-from-afar utilizes email and Internet connections to channel assistance to nonprofit organizations. Such assistance may entail performing tasks for an agency's staff, including online research, translation of documents, website design, electronic communication with other volunteers, or dissemination of materials into the online community. Or volunteers may provide online services directly to those served by the nonprofit agency, via such programs as online tutoring and mentoring, electronic “buddies” for the homebound, and online instruction in English as a second language.¹⁹ Virtual volunteering can be particularly accommodating of young people, as it allows them to tailor their volunteering schedules around school and homework, to work from home, library or an Internet café, and to sidestep the need for transportation.

One organization that relies heavily on virtual volunteers is NetAid (<http://www.netaid.org/>). In cooperation with the United Nations Volunteers Programme, NetAid matches online volunteers with nonprofit organizations to provide technical assistance, translations, data analysis and

Internet research. Service Leader (<http://www.serviceleader.org/vv/>) is another exceptional virtual volunteering site; although not specifically youth-oriented, it provides an extensive fact sheet entitled “Involving youth as on-line volunteers” that offers advice about online safety and creating a virtual volunteer program that is rewarding for youth.

2) Voting

The numbers speak for themselves, and they sound a discouraging note: Voter turnout among citizens aged 18 to 24 dropped from 50 to 32 percent over the past three decades—the most precipitous decline in voting among any age group. Roughly 15 percent of the youth civic websites we studied encourage youth participation in the electoral process: urging young people to vote, facilitating registration using an online registration form, promoting interest in elections and campaigns. Those websites include efforts both small and large.

One of the impressive large-scale efforts to promote youth voting is the Youth Vote Coalition (<http://www.youthvote.org>). Truly a coalition, the organization maintains a nonpartisan stance, accepting as members organizations that share the desire to increase youth “political and civic participation,” primarily through voting. With that basic principle in mind, Youth Vote has assembled a remarkably thorough, well-designed site full of resources pertaining to youth civic participation. These include statistics on youth voting; links to voting, academic, state, and federal websites; a state-by-state voters guide; links to legislation concerning political participation; a digest of news on civic participation; and listings of offline events.

Additionally, the site features a clickable map with information on the organization's 12 field sites around the country. Thus Youth Vote thoroughly succeeds in what it purports to deliver—timely

information on youth voting and efforts to increase such participation, including one-stop federal election information (using Votenet.com's ZIP code-based search engine) and voter registration information (operated by Rock the Vote). But despite these two handy services, the website's ultimate appeal may be as a source of information for those who work to expand civic participation, rather than as a source of inspiration to young people themselves. It appears to be a professionally run, even somewhat scholarly site, but not one designed to attract young audiences.

The venerable Rock the Vote project (<http://www.rockthevote.org/>) takes a very different approach. Established by music industry leaders to increase political participation among young people, it is a leader in organizing voter registration drives, get-out-the-vote events, and voter education efforts for young adults. Yet Rock the Vote's mission has grown far wider than voting, as its boldly colored, Flash-enhanced website makes clear. The interactive menu that heads every page trumpets a spectrum of civic options: "Register to Vote," "Action," "Issues," "Programs," "Street Team," and "Donate."

The "Register to Vote" tab links to a popup window with a voter registration form that visitors can print and mail to their state elections office, under the slogan "Fill it and print it, lick it and mail it." Other online resources for electoral engagement include an FAQ with basic information about voting, a "Campaigns and Elections" page with a calendar of political events and elections, and a page inviting visitors to join one of Rock the Vote's nationwide "Community Street Teams" that set up voter registration stands at concerts and community events.

The remaining tabs propose alternate (or complementary) forms of civic action. The "Action" menu links to a long article entitled "How Can You Rock the Vote?" that exhorts young people to use their power, defined to encompass knowledge, participation, voice, and money. It urges readers to educate themselves about political issues; to participate in volunteer activities, start petitions, and donate to charity; to lobby, testify, write a bill, campaign and vote, and even to run for office. Youth are also encouraged to protest,

participate in nonviolent civil disobedience, and buy products from companies that are socially responsible, and to create newsletters and Internet sites. It's a broad portrait of youth civic engagement.

An "Issues" menu presents a range of topics that young people can address, and in an "Action Center" visitors are furnished with pre-written, electronic letters addressed to politicians, which they are asked to personalize and sign for electronic submission by Rock the Vote. In November 2003, the site featured a letter to U.S. senators objecting to the FCC changes in media ownership rules, and a letter to President Bush urging him to "stand up for free expression" and pledging that "when America needs me I will argue, I will disagree, I will protest and I will vote."²⁰

Rock the Vote partners with popular musicians to promote its cause, recently collaborating with the Dixie Chicks in an effort to persuade young people, particularly young women, to register to vote in time for the 2004 election. The Dixie Chicks donated \$100,000 to fund a new section of the website and will appear in Rock the Vote public service announcements.



Rock the Vote

In the arena of partisan politics, the two major political parties balance each other's Web presence, vying with equal strength for the hearts and minds of young voters. GOP sites include the Young Republican's Online Community Network (<http://www.yrock.com/>) and the site of the College Republican National Committee (<http://www.crnc.org/>), which offers free website hosting for state and chapter organizations. The unconventional Republican Youth Majority (<http://www.rym.org/>), "a nationwide network of Republican students and young professionals who believe in developing a generation of Republican leaders who are pro-choice, pro-environment and pro-fiscal responsibility..." has a largely static website that posts a calendar of events. The conservative America's Future Foundation (<http://www.americasfuture.org/>), "a network of America's next generation of classical liberal leaders," maintains a database of Washington, DC, political job openings, a DC calendar of events, and a political commentary "webzine" called *Brainwash* that features articles contributed by young conservatives.

Democratic Party websites include the College Democrats of America (<http://www.collegedems.com/>), which maintains a political internship and job database, an online merchandise store, and a collection of tools such as a press kit and a list of talking points. The site of the Young Democrats of America (<http://www.yda.org/>) posts its platform, a database of chapters, and an events calendar. Many local Young Democrat and Young Republican chapters likewise have their own websites on which they post event calendars, news, and photographs. Teen Democrats and Republicans spar on TeenPolitics.com (<http://www.teenpolitics.com/>). Although a small site, TeenPolitics.com exemplifies the Internet's ability to stimulate debate, a fundamental element of political engagement. The site also exemplifies how the Internet can be an outlet for teenage creativity. It was created by

a teenager who explains, "During the summer of 2002 I decided it was time I found more political interaction on the Internet. Looking around I came up empty."²¹ So he created his own website, featuring a "Debate of the Week" in which two teenagers of opposing political views face off in an essay debate. For each topic, a brief historical background is provided, a poll is posted for visitors to cast votes, and a forum on the debate is convened in the site's discussion board.

Besides this featured debate, the discussion board is the heart of the website. It provides lively exchanges in forums such as "Domestic Policies," "Foreign Policy," and "America at War." In "Domestic Policies," for example, debate in mid-2003 raged over the University of Michigan's affirmative action policy. Liberal teens, conservative teens, whites and minorities all contributed to the conversation. The discussion is provocative because it presents the unfiltered opinions of students, not of teachers, parents, or policy makers.

Another youth-produced electoral site is Generation Vote (<http://www.generationvote.com/>). "Founded by a group of college students and young professionals," according to the site's "About Us" statement, GenerationVote.com provides

information and original content written by college students for other students in order to spur interest in the political process. We have created a network of young people from around the country to contribute to the site and encourage political activism and political participation. This site is a 100% volunteer effort....²²

The site offers political news and opinion, including a "Viewpoints" section where young people express their views on current political issues through op-ed-style opinion pieces. The site also offers links to 12 political parties, 22 political organizations, 19 news websites, and selected election campaigns. The mix of young people's

perspectives with those of professional political commentators is welcome, although in the absence of any analysis of the different perspectives, such diversity of voices may prove confusing to the political neophyte. All in all, however, the site is an impressive example of the commitment of some young people to the cause of political literacy.

Some websites encourage a particular subsection of the youth population to vote to promote the interests of their social, racial, or age community. The almost identical mission statements posted on the websites of the NAACP Youth and College Voter Empowerment Program (<http://www.naacp.org/work/voter/ycvoter.shtml>) and the National Coalition on Black Civic Engagement Black Youth Vote Project (<http://www.bigvote.org/byv.htm>) illustrate this function. The goals of these groups are, respectively, “to channel the energy of young African Americans between the ages of 18-25 in a positive direction to impact public policy affecting Black Youth,” and “to channel energy in a positive direction impacting public policy affecting Black youth.”²³ Both sites are essentially static information repositories, stating the goals and the activities (generally offline) of the organizations they represent.

For young people under the voting age, some sites emphasize the importance of a voting culture. One such site, Freedom’s Answer (<http://www.freedomanswer.org/>), “seeks to make today’s students tomorrow’s voters” by involving students in election-day support activities. Students involved in Freedom’s Answer conduct voter registration drives in their communities and serve as volunteers at polling places (in states where those under the age of 18 can legally do so). Along with information on the project’s offline programs, the Freedom’s Answer website provides a “Get Involved” button where interested students can sign up to participate.

Another site designed to involve under-voting-age youth is Kids Voting USA (<http://www.kidsvotingusa.org>), which extends the electoral process to grades K-12 with a program that enables students to visit official polling places on election day (accompanied by a parent or guardian) and cast a facsimile ballot. Through civic education, family participation, and community involvement, KVUSA has reached over 4 million students and 200,000 teachers in some 20,000 voter precincts, the website states. The Kids Voting project has been evaluated by researchers and found to yield concrete results; according to the site, these include equalizing the interest and participation of students of differing socio-economic status in classroom discussion of current events and voting; closing the gender gap; and stimulating the parents of participating students to learn and to vote.²⁴ While these changes are realized offline rather than on, the Internet makes its own contribution by bringing both the project and the research to the attention of a much wider audience.

In short, the Web allows for depth of content, diversity of viewpoint, practical applications, and youth-friendly packaging as it encourages young people to vote. These resources, if assessed for accuracy, appropriateness, and balance, could be included in formal civic education programs. Their fresh approaches and youth voice could contribute to making civic content more engaging for young people—an urgent task, given the extent of youth disengagement from politics.

3) Youth Philanthropy

Studies have found that Americans know how to give not only time but also money: Over 90 percent of all households make charitable contributions.²⁵ And, according to survey findings, 92 percent of American adults believe that encouraging children to participate in charities helps them develop into better citizens.²⁶ There is growing con-

cern, however, that philanthropic behavior is a lesson younger Americans have failed to master. When charitable donations were studied according to age group, 18-to-35-year olds were by far the least giving, both in the percentage that gave and the median amount they contributed.²⁷

While relatively few people donate online, the Internet is beginning to have an indirect impact on charitable giving. A study by Independent Sector found that in 2000 only three percent of Internet-connected respondents actually made online donations, but 14 percent of that group used the Internet to learn about charitable organizations.²⁸ For younger Americans, more at home in the online world, the Web may come to assume a larger role. In an online survey of over 10,000 Internet users, Network for Good/Bridgespan discovered that “Age is the best predictor of the method of giving. Online givers are generally younger, more Internet-savvy....”²⁹

Although specialized youth philanthropy sites are rare, fully a third of the sites we surveyed offered opportunities to learn about philanthropy, become involved in philanthropy, or make a charitable contribution online. In many cases, these opportunities consisted of putting youth in contact with offline venues. However, the Web now boasts some forms of giving that are unique to the online environment. Many civic websites display a “Donate Now” button that links visitors to a Web page where they can use a credit card to donate online. Over the past five years, these buttons have become commonplace, appearing on a wide variety of nonprofit organizations’ websites. It is not known how effective they are on youth websites, given that many young people do not have credit cards.

A variant on the “Donate Now” button is “click here and we’ll donate.” Each time a visitor clicks a designated button, a host sponsor donates a small amount of money, such as five cents, to a



YouthNOISE

designated cause. The money is often provided by commercial groups in exchange for a prominently displayed advertisement on the site. This approach has proven its capacity to generate a large volume of “clicks” and sizeable amounts of money. The Hunger Site (<http://www.hungersite.com/>), which is the longest-running “click-and-we’ll-give” site, reports that “All in all, in the year 2002, visitors’ clicks ... in addition to their other actions on the site ... funded a total of 47,919,670 cups of food to the hungry.”³⁰

YouthNOISE (<http://www.YouthNOISE.org/>), a youth activism site sponsored by Save the Children, has brought this concept into the world of youth civic websites. The site’s homepage features a “Just 1 Click” button, which donates five cents per click to a designated cause, with youth limited to one paying click per day. YouthNOISE sets goals for the amount of money it wishes to raise for each cause and finds a new beneficiary cause when the original goal has been met. Their success is impressive: campaigns have generated \$5,000 to build a safe playground for kids in a dangerous neighborhood, \$10,000 in tuition scholarships to a camp for homeless children, and \$10,000 in school supplies to send to Afghan girls.³¹ (A detailed case history of YouthNOISE appears in Chapter 3.)

These figures demonstrate successful engagement of youth in a form of charitable giving. Nevertheless, the “you click/we give” model raises ques-

tions that merit further study. This type of philanthropy requires neither personal effort nor personal generosity. Can something as simple as a mouse click establish charitable giving as a lasting behavior among young people? And what effect does it have on young people's sense of civic responsibility? Might it suggest that they can fulfill their obligation to the greater good with "just one click"? Or that they can ask others to contribute to the good of society rather than taking positive action themselves? Answering these questions will require closely-focused investigation.

Another approach to fostering philanthropy among youth is to teach them fundraising skills. Online guidance on raising money is offered by a number of national civic organizations as a resource for their local chapters. It is visible in the websites of such organizations as Youth Crime Watch of America (<http://www.ycwa.org/start/index.html>), United Students Against Sweatshops (<http://www.usasnet.org/>), and Youth for Life (<http://www.members.tripod.com/~joseromia/>). Each offers at least a page (the latter two offer whole chapters) of fundraising information, intended as resources for their local chapters or affiliates. These documents, with names like "Fundraising HowTos" and "Sustaining Your Program," describe sources of support ranging from bake sales to grant-writing to individual solicitation. Although the information is intended for specific organizations, much of it is general enough to apply to youth engaged in any civic activity. The inclusion of fundraising how-to's on youth websites not only provides training in these valuable and sometimes daunting civic skills; it also helps to place charitable giving on young people's civic agendas.

Foundations are an outstanding feature of the philanthropic landscape. Historically they have played a vital role in solving pressing societal needs, from the development of the Salk polio vaccine, to establishing community libraries across

Youth for Life

America, to launching "Sesame Street."³² Their role is projected to increase in the United States in coming years. Curtis Meadows, Jr., former president of the Meadows Foundation, notes that foundation giving is a significant mechanism for the transfer of wealth:

It has been predicted that in the next twenty years as much as ten trillion dollars will be passed from one generation to another. Whatever the actual amount turns out to be, it will be the largest transfer of wealth in history.... As we increasingly shift the social safety net from government to the private sector and as responsibility for action moves from the national to the state and local scene, our philanthropic action will be needed as never before.³³

To prepare today's youth to share in the decision-making about where that wealth will go, some foundations are making room for youth activists on their granting and governing boards. The Internet permits other young people to learn about this process.

Youth grantmaking came onto the philanthropy radar in 1988, when the W. K. Kellogg Foundation began investing in the "Youth Project" of the Michigan Community Foundations, training a team of young people to help make grants. The concept of youth grantmaking has since evolved, leading the *Chronicle of Philanthropy* to estimate that today there are at least 500 youth-governed or youth-advised grant-making groups.³⁴ Our study located one website devoted entirely to youth

grantmaking: the Center for Youth as Resources (CYAR, <http://yar.org/>). CYAR facilitates community-based programs that make grants to young people for local service projects, with youth participating with adults on the boards that evaluate grant proposals and decide whom and how much to fund.

A colorful and user-friendly website, CYAR provides background information and timely updates on the activities of this national organization and its 80 community affiliates. A “Start Your Own YAR” page gives interested visitors a set of guidelines for starting a local board. Another page allows visitors to browse through YAR boards by location to find existing programs in their area. Other pages provide updated resources for those already involved in YAR programs. Collectively, these pages give young people a glimpse of the roles they could play in the foundation world.

The online youth philanthropy landscape also includes sites *about* youth grantmaking, but intended for adults. Although these sites do not address youth directly, they do increase the visibility of young people as grantors. These sites include Youth Grantmakers (<http://www.youthgrantmakers.org/>), the website of the Michigan Community Foundations’ Youth Project (MCFYP); Ridgefield Community Foundation’s Philanthropic Youth Council of Ridgefield, Connecticut (<http://www.ridgefieldcf.org/youth.html>); and the Youth Philanthropy Initiative of Indiana (<http://www.ypin.org/>). Although these sites make unremarkable use of Internet technology, their presence on the Web serves a worthwhile purpose: to offer a vision of the ex-

tensive, effective roles young people can assume as funders of civic projects.

4) Engagement with the Local Community

When young people’s disengagement from public life is measured in voting statistics, the resulting portrait is bleak. But when civic engagement is defined to include involvement with the local community, the evidence for youth engagement rises significantly.



Center for Youth as Resources

Before the Internet, community-based organizations reached out largely through word of mouth, telephone trees, flyers, and newsletters. Judging from our study, the overarching trend in local organizations’ websites is that they have transferred many of these functions di-

rectly to the Web: fliers and telephone trees become listservs, newsletters become frequently-updated websites. It’s basic—the electronic versions are rarely interactive—but it works. Local youth organizations benefit as organizing and outreach become faster and more far-reaching.

The San Francisco Bay Area-based Youth Media Council (<http://www.youthmediacouncil.org>) demonstrates crisp, clean use of a website for these basic purposes. Made up of representatives from eleven Bay Area youth organizations, the Youth Media Council works to strengthen the growing youth movement in Northern California. It does so by training young people as media analysts, activists, and leaders and building the media capacity of area youth organizations. This complex and specialized work is conducted face-to-face, so the website plays a backup, informational role. It is organized into such basic sec-

tions as Introduction, About Us, Strategies and Projects, and Publications and Tools. Excitement in this website is generated not by flash animation or celebrity quotes, but by the sophisticated mission of the organization. A section called “YouthSpeak” injects a welcome, lively voice as youth reflect on media work through rap, poetry and interviews.

Another function of community-based youth civic websites is local dissemination of youth voices and alternative news. Youth Communication

(<http://www.youthcommunication-vox.org/>) is a nonprofit organization in Atlanta that helps young people publish their own magazine, *VOX*, where “teenagers from around Atlanta work together, share information, lead workshops, and create forums for free expres-

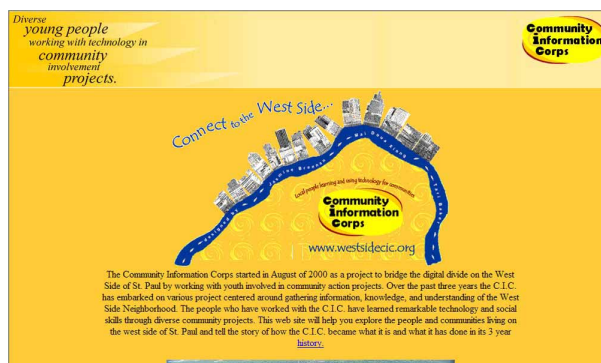
sion to fill an information void and to engage teens as active builders of a stronger community.”³⁵ *VOX* is created by teens monthly during the school year and distributed free at public high schools in the Atlanta area. The website highlights this journalistic project and reproduces the magazine content online. It also describes other, offline programs the organization offers, such as peer support groups and workshops and forums on free speech. Articles in one issue of *VOX* included a critique of a local high school as well as discussions of growing up gay, Black History month, and birth control. While some of these topics could have addressed a national youth audience, each article also provided local flavor. The article on birth control, for example, concluded with information on Georgia’s abortion laws as well as the phone numbers of women’s health clinics in the Atlanta metro area.

While production of *VOX* continued as of fall 2003, the website’s online posting of the magazine’s content lagged behind. The reason: lack of funding for staff support and technology. Although the website was a “top priority” for both the teens and the organization, finding financial support was “really tough, especially for nonprofits doing youth development and youth civic engagement work, as contrasted with crisis intervention,” according to the organization’s executive director.³⁶ Another obstacle she reported was a local lack of concern for freedom

of speech for youth. Inadequate funding for projecting youth voices, and for sustaining Web-based communication in general, is an obstacle facing many youth civic organizations, our study found.

Among the most imaginative of community civic projects online is

the Community Information Corps website (<http://www.westsiddecic.org>) of St. Paul, Minnesota. This is an expansive site concerned with exploring, documenting, and sharing the riches and resources that a neighborhood has to offer. The site demonstrates community “mapping”: taking an inventory of local resources and plotting them in an online geographic display. The colorful, engaging, and informative civic resources on the CIC site are the end result of a process that immersed youth in their community. For example, West Side young people conducted almost one hundred interviews to identify and map “learning opportunities” in their neighborhood: schools, churches, health centers, recreation centers and the local Boys and Girls Club (<http://www.westsiddecic.org/maps.htm>). Other youth-generated maps on the website pinpoint local businesses, organizations, and transportation routes.



Community Information Corps

The potential of mapping to become a multifaceted teaching tool is apparent in the map of community murals. During the summer of 2002, CIC hired teenagers to document the many murals in St. Paul's West Side neighborhood. They created a map that pinpoints the location of public art in West Side's parks and streets and on the walls of houses and restaurants (<http://www.westsidetic.org/mural/links.HTM>). Ringing the map are clickable photos of the murals, linking the viewer to a close-up of each. The teenage mappers also collected oral histories, so most photos are accompanied by fascinating accounts of the area's history from the mural artists or from long-time neighborhood residents. The murals reflect the neighborhood's immigrant roots, from its large Mexican-American community to its more recent Hmong arrivals.

The CIC site is rather complex and more than a little confusing. Sections are unevenly developed and the internal and external links are varied, making site navigation tricky. But the spirit of online community activism is so prevalent throughout the site, and the site overall is so engaging, that the user can easily overlook its occasional architectural shortcomings. In 2003, CIC merged with Public Achievement, an initiative of the University of Minnesota's Center for Democracy and Citizenship (<http://www.publicwork.org/home.html>). While no longer updated, the CIC site remains online and serves as a model of identifying, "mapping" and celebrating community resources and multi-ethnicity.

In some cases, national organizations encourage young people to take local civic action. Do Something (<http://www.dosomething.org/>) is one such group. It is a national organization dedicated to involving young people in locally-based, offline service-learning, character-building, and civic activities. In a multi-step application process, a group of teens and the school mentor they select

envision a key component of a better community, explain why that particular cause is important to them, and submit an action plan to Do Something for achieving their vision. Approved groups are awarded \$500 to carry out the project, a process that has involved over four million youth and one million dollars in grants thus far. Do Something also administers a "Kindness and Justice Challenge," encouraging young people to perform acts of kindness (helping others) and acts of justice ("standing up for what's right") at their schools, homes, or communities for the two-week period following the Martin Luther King, Jr., national holiday.

Founded by actor Andrew Shue and administered primarily by young adults, Do Something draws on the contributions of a youth "Trendspotter Team" to advise staff and to contribute to the website. As the site explains,

These young people, ages 13 to 18, help keep Do Something's staff in tune to what's hot, fresh, and hip in a teen's world. We look to our trendspotters to write stories about issues important to them, let us know what they care about, and give us their opinion about our website strategy.

More youth-created content appears in a poetry section and discussion boards. The website also offers staff-written articles on community engagement and self-improvement, and links to other community service organizations.³⁷

Celebrities have lent their names to the causes and content on the site (e.g., basketball star Grant Hill speaking out against teen pregnancy, rap star Sean "Puffy" Combs urging AIDS awareness, and actress Jamie-Lyn Sigler's first-person account of her struggles with anorexia). Do Something supporters include Blockbuster, *Rolling Stone* magazine, Applied Materials, the Pew Charitable Trusts, Perrier, Levi's, and "hundreds" of individual contributors. Regrettably, while big-name supporters are named, what's least visible on this website is

local involvement. While one outstanding project is featured on the homepage, in general there is minimum visibility for the projects that young people have initiated and the communities that have benefited.

As these examples indicate, organizations that involve youth in community civic action have a strong presence in the “dot.org” world. Whether they offer their activities online, use the Internet as a means to publicize programs in the bricks-and-mortar world, or both, local civic organizations have embraced the Internet as a way of working with youth. In the best cases, they offer youth a new arena in which to speak both about and to their local communities.

5) Global Issues and International Understanding

An emerging aspect of youth civic engagement is the understanding that the civic role can extend beyond the borders of nation-states. This “globalization” of civic action is evident in websites that promote international awareness and collaboration. Some five percent of the sites in this study are efforts to explore global affairs or foster international understanding among youth. While many simply post online brochures, others have found innovative ways to help young people interact with their peers in other countries and cultures.

Global Response (<http://www.globalresponse.org>) utilizes the Internet’s international reach and lightning speed to engage young people in international environmental advocacy. The Boulder, Colorado-based organization sponsors letter-writing campaigns to promote environmental protection and the rights of indigenous peoples worldwide. By voicing concern for peoples and environments around the world and facilitating international responses—its network involves people from 92 countries—Global Response underscores the global dimension to civic engagement.

The website, offered in English and Spanish, provides background information, along with three separate, age-appropriate versions of its current action request: one for third through eighth graders, one for high school students, and another for college students and adults. In August 2003, the featured “current action” called for protection of endangered tropical rainforests and mountain cloud forests in Honduras.³⁸ The site provided striking photos and detailed text—at three levels of sophistication—on the endangered ecosystems and their importance to local populations. Site visitors were then asked to send letters to the president of Honduras, calling for environmental protection and respect for the human rights of Honduran environmental activists.

The Global Response website takes the unusual step of providing details on its rate of success. Statistics detail the number of campaigns undertaken over 12 years (86), the number of successes (38), and their success rate expressed as a percent. As the site explains,

We think an over-all success rate of 44.2% shows tremendously positive impact. Each letter you write has nearly a 50-50 chance of contributing to a significant victory for environmental protection. *To what do we attribute this great success rate?* Solid research into the issues, effective partnerships with local and international organizations, and a membership that is committed to letter-writing as effective citizen action for social change.³⁹

This is a good example of a civic website that holds its work to a standard of achievement. Interestingly, few civic websites make such an attempt to convey to young people the importance not only of making an effort, but also of ensuring a result.

Internationally oriented websites also facilitate direct dialogue among youth worldwide. One such site is Voices of Youth (VOY, <http://www.unicef.org/voy>), created by UNICEF in 1996 in anticipation of its fiftieth anniversary.

The site is a platform for young people to discuss their collective future; its message board is conducted simultaneously in English, French, and Spanish. It covers issues outlined in UNICEF's "10 Imperatives for Children," including the rights to live in peace, have decent shelter, be healthy and well-nourished, have clean water, play and go to school, and be protected from violence, abuse, and exploitation. A list of discussion topics is grouped on the homepage, with links under each group to picture galleries, interactive games, a message board for each topic, and much more. There are thousands of entries on an impressively wide range of topics. In an entry in early 2003 (under the "World Fit for Children" topic), a Pakistani youth outlines the abuse of children who are sent out into the street by their families to beg. He makes a request for people to write to the Pakistani government and gives address information. The next thread is from a youth who says the only solution is for Pakistan to reunite with India. The reply from the boy in Pakistan is that while that may be a good idea, it can't happen because of tensions between Hindus and Muslims.⁴⁰ This sort of substantive interchange stands in welcome contrast to the often disjointed, inconsequential talk found on many commercial message boards.

VOY makes its priorities clear by emphasizing content over style. The site uses a simple format that accommodates older computers, which might balk at a flashier, more graphics-intensive design. Instead, it is the importance of the issues discussed on the message boards, and the depth and activity of the discussions, that make this website stand out.

In contrast, the website TakingITGlobal (<http://www.takingitglobal.org/>) can be seen as the deluxe version of international youth dialogue. This vast website is home to a set of interrelated online projects that offer young people connections, re-

sources, opportunities and choices – lots and lots of choices. To address them, TakingITGlobal (TIG) offers a powerhouse of online technology. The Community section of the website notes modestly that it "allows members to find each other and communicate." This is no small undertaking, as the TIG community encompasses 25,000 members from 200 countries. (Membership is free and open to all via online registration.) Peer-to-peer communication is offered over a variety of platforms: message boards, an internal Instant Messaging system, and live moderated chats with instant, machine-run language translation. Members can also create their own online groups, either around a particular issue, or simply as a convenient place for a preexisting group to meet. A search tool allows young people to locate groups based on shared location, interest, language, and more.

Other sections of the website offer their own high-tech treasures: a clickable "Global Gallery," which, according to the site, is one of the largest and most international collections of youth art online; an online Projects area where youth can profile the development projects they're involved with and get online feedback from others in this far-flung network; and a set of interactive databases (which allow users to post to the lists as well as browse them) cataloging youth-related events, scholarships, grants, financial opportunities and awards, and more than 2,000 non-governmental organizations and international agencies.

Two other features are particularly impressive. By clicking on the country of one's choice in the interactive map of the world, one sees not only the number of TIG members who live there, but a brief country profile, news updates, descriptions of youth projects underway, and art and articles by that country's young people. Finally, in conjunction with the Global Youth Action Network (<http://www.takingitglobal.org/>) and

YouthNOISE (<http://www.youthnoise.org/>), TIG is helping to create the “Chat the Planet” TV show, which uses video technology to link young people from different countries to discuss such important issues as activism and war. Members can watch clips or join the conversation by logging onto the Chat the Planet website using their TIG membership IDs. For a young person seeking a portal into global issues or a chance to talk with peers from around the world, this site is a dazzling launching pad. Whether its decision to go high-tech restricts this opportunity to a more privileged audience than that of Voices of Youth would bear investigation, however.

iEARN, the International Education and Resource Network (<http://www.iearn.org>), is a nonprofit global network enabling young people to engage in collaborative educational projects online. The site describes itself as an inclusive, culturally diverse community linking 15,000 schools in 100 countries. Its aim is twofold, both to “enhance learning and make a difference in the world.” The learning projects of iEARN are designed and facilitated by teachers and students to fit their classroom needs while increasing international understanding. Topics run the gamut of traditional academic subjects (math, science, the arts, and the like), but are often far from traditional in their form and purpose. Under social studies, for example, youth may connect with participants from other countries to work on projects as varied as “AIDSWEB: Social Action For Education with Today’s Youth,” a collaborative effort to develop an Internet-based HIV/AIDS education curriculum; “Doors to Peace (*Puertas Para la Paz*),” which seeks to build a culture based on peace; the “Greensphere Project,” working to improve the quality of life in poor communities by creating recreational outdoor activities; and the “RESPECT and Refugees Project,” which helps students be-

come aware of refugee populations and the traumas and difficulties they face.

To join, teachers and students select a project, then enter online “forum spaces” to share work and ideas with other teacher/student teams from around the world. Participants can contribute ideas, personal stories, poems, images, oral stories (audio files), music, animations, and movies. Discussion groups for the projects are conducted both via closed, school-based message boards and open USENET or email groups. iEARN also provides links to outside information and organizations to help young people grasp the global implications of the projects in which they choose to participate. The iEARN *Project Book of 2003* (http://www.iearn.org/projects/iearnprojectbook_2003-2004.pdf) gives thumbnail portraits of the dazzling array of efforts currently underway.



Through collaboration with youth in distant locales, nonprofit organizations invite young people to act as global citizens. The Internet, with its global reach, its speed, versatility, and interactivity, is the tool that makes this possible.

6) Youth Online Journalism and Media Production

If, in relation to youth, the primary difference between the “old” and “new” media could be reduced to a single word, that word would be *participation*. As opposed to the one-way print and broadcast media of the past, the new online media afford youth an opportunity to respond. They are doing so in astonishing variety. Nearly half of all the youth civic websites we surveyed invite youth to participate online in some fashion, and almost a third provide opportunities for visitors

to submit essays, articles, reviews, op-eds, or artwork to their sites.

On youth journalism sites, young people learn to question the world around them, understand how government and society work, collaborate with journalists and editors, and communicate to far broader audiences than they might reach through traditional print outlets. Besides benefiting individual youth, these sites also provide new models for mass media communications. They amplify preexisting youth media sources, provide a means of expression for marginalized voices, and—to a degree unprecedented in previous forms of media—promote dialogue between content providers and content consumers. Such dialogue breaks the one-way “lock” that news professionals generally hold on their audiences. A new, two-way schema takes its place.

One of the best-known youth journalism websites is WireTap (<http://www.wiretapmag.org/>), an online magazine that refers to itself as “Youth in pursuit of the dirty truth.” Created by Alternet (<http://www.alternet.org/>), a progressive online magazine and news service, WireTap serves up youth-written reporting, analysis, and cultural reviews on a wide range of contemporary issues. A late-2003 issue, for example, offered interviews by a “youth team” of the Democratic candidates for president; a first-hand account of the anti-Free Trade Area of the Americas demonstrations in Miami; reviews of two punk bands and a Brazilian Afro-reggae band; and an interview with a 15-year-old activist addressing education, poverty, and prisons in California. WireTap serves as a training ground for young writers, and the quality of the writing is uneven; at the same time, individual voices

are clear and perspectives can be refreshing and unexpected. A detailed profile of WireTap is presented in Chapter 3.

The Pacific News Service (PNS) (<http://www.pacificnews.org/>) is a nonprofit wire service that syndicates stories written by marginalized populations, with the goal of “bringing the seldom heard, often misunderstood or ignored voices and ideas into the public forum.”⁴¹ In 1995, PNS brought the voices of marginalized youth into its media stream by sponsoring *YO! Youth Outlook*, a print magazine based in the San Francisco Bay Area. PNS also syndicates its youth-produced stories to the Associated Press.

YO! Youth Outlook’s website (<http://www.youthoutlook.org/mainframe.php3>) features a picture of the latest issue of the print



YO! Youth Outlook

magazine, but offers more content than most sites designed to supplement a magazine. It also gives its youthful writers a national platform from which they can express their opinions on national issues, thereby amplifying youth voice. The site designers are careful not to overwhelm young viewers with too much prose, offering instead a balance of text and graphics. Teasers to stories are one sentence long, and links are accompanied by colorful cartoon graphics. The stories, all of which are archived online, range from personal issues such as hair care (“Braid it Up: The Art of Braiding”), to political issues such as enforcement of homeland security legislation and its effect on immigrants (“On Detention: An Afghan American Experiences Homeland Security First Hand”) and on minority students (“Homeland Security Hits Oakland High”).⁴² While stories are anecdotal and often contain little

background information about the underlying political issues, they nevertheless provide insight into the effects of public policy on the lives of young people. Each article concludes with information about how to take action, or with a question designed to provoke response. Instead of passive acceptance of the opinions expressed in a piece, this format encourages individual consideration of issues and the formation of opinions on topics of civic concern.

The “outreach” section of the website illustrates YO staffers’ active involvement in civic discourse at high schools. Staff writers go into schools and moderate discussions on such issues as world peace, jobs, money, and terrorism. They leave behind a question or idea to serve as a prompt for further writing, and the YO website may publish the students’ responses. In this way the site builds civic “affect,” the sense that what one has to say is of interest and importance to others. Conversations begun in schools are often continued in the “e-graffiti” section of the website, which encourages visitors to log in and offer feedback on stories. Writers often respond to feedback, making them accountable to readers and allowing the audience to feel more connected to the authors they’re reading.

Since the early 1990s, the New York-based non-profit Youth Communication (<http://www.youthcomm.org/>) has been training young journalists and guiding them in the production of two monthly magazines. *New Youth Connections* is a general-interest magazine centered on issues affecting teens, especially those of inner city New York, while *Foster Care Youth United* is written by and for young people living in the foster care system. The Youth Communication website is the online extension of these print magazines.

The stories from *Foster Care Youth United* are intended to help young people in the foster care

system deal with familial, societal, and personal struggles. Such articles as “The Miseducation of Foster Youth: When Group Home Teachers Expect the Worst” and “Separate But Not Equal: Why do so Many Foster Youth Get Stuck in Special Ed?” encourage this unique population to consider whether they are receiving adequate educational opportunities, and how their education might be affected by their status as foster care clients.⁴³ Promoting this type of questioning trains youth to think about how and where they fit into society. Youth Communication offers support and direction to channel young people’s social awareness into civic action.

Youth Radio (<http://www.youthradio.org/>) similarly empowers youth through media. This organization teaches young people a skilled trade—radio broadcasting and/or Web design—and then provides them a venue in which to exercise their skills. In the process, Youth Radio fosters important civic attributes as well as vocational ones, helping youth “strengthen... verbal expression, writing, computer technology, critical thinking, conflict resolution and more,” according to the Youth Radio mission statement.⁴⁴ The site itself posts streaming audio files of recent radio packages and a schedule of three daily Youth Radio shows. Available reports have variously examined the influence of religion on President George W. Bush’s decision-making, post-9/11 threats to civil liberties, language discrimination, and the declining job market. Transcripts are also available from shows on a wide variety of topics.

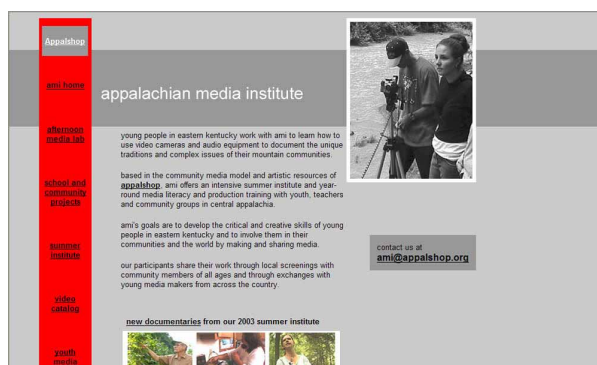
Youth Radio seems to dig deeper than other sites in its quest to amplify the voices of the *most* marginalized youths. “Voices from Behind Bars” (<http://www.youthradio.org/about/sweeney.shtml>) is a radio program devoted entirely to reports generated by incarcerated youths at the Camp Sweeney juvenile detention center. Each week an outreach coordinator and a youth volunteer take a portable DJ system and tape re-

corder to the detention center and teach the incarcerated 14-to-17-year-olds how to mix music and write and edit commentaries to create a radio package. The trainees then produce regular public affairs commentary for Youth Radio. In this way Youth Radio is both feeding a rarely heard voice into the news stream, and preparing the teens in Camp Sweeney to reintegrate into society.

Media Production

Before the existence of the Internet and the rise of the so-called digital revolution, multimedia production and distribution were limited to the few in society who possessed the skills, funding, and equipment necessary to handle complex mixed-media projects. With the arrival of affordable PCs and the Internet, multimedia production and distribution have become much more broadly accessible. Today, the Internet offers young artists, authors, and activists an interactive communication tool that allows them to combine text, images, video, animation, and audio into a product that can carry content, including civic messages, to a global audience at relatively low cost. Although technological problems still exist (such as the bandwidth-intensive nature of video delivered over the Web), many young producers, with assistance from their supporting institutions, have found creative ways to adapt to the new networked environment and publish their civic messages.

The Appalachian Media Institute (<http://www.appalshop.org/ami/>) has been working with young people, educators, and communities in eastern Kentucky since 1988. AMI is based at Appalshop (<http://www.appalshop.org/>), an Appalachian media arts and education center, and strives to help young people develop skills in Web, video, and audio production while gaining a better understanding of their unique mountain communities. In 1998, AMI was honored with the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities "Coming Up Taller" award.



Appalachian Media Institute

The Institute's programs teach young participants about Web, video, and audio production. During a Summer Institute, student interns produce short documentary video projects, study media literacy, learn about artistic investigation and leadership skills, and then work in teams to produce longer documentary videos about life in Appalachia. Students' documentaries are screened at local and national film festivals and distributed via the AMI website. Youth-produced documentaries on the website (<http://www.appalshop.org/ami/catalog.htm>) include "Taking Care of Our Own," tracing the care of the elderly in eastern Kentucky; "McRoberts: Eastern Kentucky Coal Camp," in which "residents of an eastern Kentucky coal camp discuss the town's past, present and future in an era of economic downturn"; "Through Their Eyes: Stories of Gays and Lesbians in the Mountains," exploring "the tensions between identifying with family, church, and community roots while feeling pressured to hide an important part of one's identity," and "Reaching for Higher Ground: Youth Activism in the Mountains," which "documents the power and practice of youth involvement in eastern Kentucky communities."⁴⁵ The work of the Appalachian Media Institute is unique in that it not only gives rural youth an opportunity to develop sophisticated media skills but also enables them to give voice to isolated communities that struggle to be heard in the modern world, helping to shape local and national perceptions about their culture and needs.

Another multimedia project, the Youth Media Corps (<http://www.kqed.org/topics/education/medialiteracy/youthmedia/>), sponsored by San Francisco public broadcasting station KQED, encourages collaborations between young people and media professionals to produce broadcast-quality media for KQED's television, radio, and Internet outlets. According to the Youth Media Corps website, young people "learn about the role of media in the community and how to use media as a tool for raising community awareness and addressing bias in the media."⁴⁶ Introducing the participants to career opportunities in video production, journalism, and Web design, KQED also believes that "by adding youth voices into the regular mix of mainstream media the KQED Youth Media Corps ensures accurate, relevant and fair representation of issues that affect youth and their communities."⁴⁷

The Youth Media Corps' work is divided into several campaigns, each featured on the website, with video clips, interviews, photographs, artwork, surveys, poetry, and related links. The Teen Pregnancy campaign (<http://www.kqed.org/w/ymc/pregnancy/index.html>), for example, features content developed by teens for teens as "guidance and support in making more careful decisions that may affect our future goals."⁴⁸ The project home page contains a short QuickTime animation entitled "Having a Baby is Not the Answer," which presents a dramatized conversation between a young woman who thinks she's pregnant and her mother, who was once a pregnant teen herself. The video ends with the following message: "You think you're ready? You're not even prepared." On the "Interviews" page, visitors can watch four QuickTime interviews with teen girls who became pregnant, including one with a fourteen-year-old girl who was six months pregnant when interviewed. Some of the statements offer a positive view of teen pregnancy, making it clear that the Teen Pregnancy campaign gives teens

an opportunity to voice their honest opinions on a controversial topic that directly reflects their lives and their communities.

The mission of the "Immigrant Voices" campaign, according to the young creators who worked on the project, is to educate people about immigrants, including the emotional difficulties they face in response to rejection and to assimilation. Accordingly, the Immigrant Voices website (<http://www.kqed.org/w/ymc/immigrant/index.html>) offers essays, video interviews, public service announcements (PSAs), an interactive survey, and links to resources about immigration hardships and the process of Americanization. One brief PSA, "Education," is a dramatization of a Chinese couple telling their son that they're emigrating to America for the good of his future. It then shows the young man in America struggling with his classes and facing bullying by his fellow students. The video ends with his mother saying that she cannot understand why he's having difficulty in school after being in America for a year.

Both the Teen Pregnancy and Immigrant Voices campaigns offer young people opportunities to develop their civic skills by examining the issues that are closest to them. Controversial topics are not watered down or sanitized for site visitors. Instead, youth are encouraged to share with their peers—and, by virtual extension, with the world—their opinions and insights into troubling social problems.

Listen Up! (<http://www.listenup.org/>) is a national youth media network that helps youth video producers and their adult mentors exchange work, share ideas and learn from each other. Its purpose is explicitly civic; the network exists to "help youth be heard in the mass media, contributing to a culture of free speech and social responsibility." Members are youth "creating media at high schools, after-school programs, media arts cen-

ters, non-profits and with independent programs across the country.”⁴⁹ The website serving this network is enormous. Each of the 70 members is provided with an individual Web page (the list of members can be browsed alphabetically or via an interactive map), while three sections in the site allow the visitor to view media created by network members. “Watch Media” presents short videos, viewable in QuickTime or Real Media format, on such themes as anti-violence, “think 4 yourself,” and health. “Projects” are compilations of youth productions that tell significant stories about their lives. And a section of PSAs presents youth-produced 30-second public service messages that “tell it like it is, in a voice that youth will understand and trust — their own.”⁵⁰

The website also offers news of interest to its members — festivals and upcoming media events, funding sources, jobs and internships, screenings, new programs, and more. Media production tools for hands-on work are made available through the website, including manuals, guides and toolkits, links, downloads and online archives.

Listen Up!’s “parent” organization is Learning Matters, which produces the Merrow Reports, a television series on education that is aired on PBS. Listen Up! uses space on the PBS website, although it does not have an “official relationship.”⁵¹ Listen Up! is funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Open Society Institute, Surdna Foundation, Annenberg Foundation, and Met Life Foundation. Its partnerships with the Merrow Report, P.O.V., MediaRights.org, Wiretap, and MediaChannel.org contribute to a diverse collection of media resources that help youth creatively express themselves on issues of concern.

Online youth multimedia offer a vivid and authentic view of youth perspectives. Older as

well as younger viewers will appreciate the insights they offer into the lives of young people, who are thus enabled to share their personal voices in this most public of mediums.

7) Access and Equity

To understand the potential civic impact of the Internet on disadvantaged youth, it is necessary to traverse what has come to be called the “digital divide,” which separates the “haves,” who enjoy access to computers—and, by extension, to the Internet, its information, and its openings for civic engagement—from the “have-nots,” who remain cut off from such access. Concern over the dearth of technology in low-income and rural communities has yielded government, corporate, and nonprofit programs that target the technology needs of schools, Native Americans, low-income and inner-city neighborhoods, libraries, housing projects, and cultural centers.⁵² The Clinton-Gore administration made strides to close the gap between the haves and have-nots with the establishment of the “e-rate” program, which makes subsidized Internet connectivity available to the nation’s libraries and schools. However, with the change of administration, the tendency in Washington has been to refer to the digital divide in the past tense—as a problem solved by the marketplace, thanks to declining costs of hardware, flat-rate pricing for online access, and the increasing acceptance of the Internet as a necessity rather than a luxury.

To those without a particular political stake in this battle, the results appear inconclusive.⁵³ Viewed from the perspective of just a few years ago, the progress made in closing the technology gap looks very much like a victory. Viewed from the perspective of universal service (that is, the goal of ensuring that all Americans enjoy access to basic telephone service, and extending that concept to include telecommunications as well), the gap between those who are connected and those who

are not is all too apparent. Less than a quarter of households with annual incomes between \$15,000 and \$25,000 are connected to the Internet, for example, compared to more than 80 percent of households with incomes above \$75,000 annually. Sixty percent of white Americans have Internet access, compared to 32 percent of Hispanics and 40 percent of blacks.⁵⁴

Beneath the surface issue of technology acquisition lie the even more complicated issues of social use, community integration, and civic engagement. The requirement now is to ascertain not simply whether the wiring is complete in any given community or neighborhood, but also whether the circuits are open and the pertinent civic, informational, and expressive content is flowing in *both* directions. Some youth civic websites are helping to assure that it is.

Launched in 1996 by Richard Calton, a former New York City public school teacher, HarlemLive (<http://www.harlemlive.org/>) is an online magazine written, edited, and produced by New York youth. In the words of the website producers, the site's mission is

to empower a diverse group of youth towards leadership using experience and exposure to media and technology.... HarlemLive teens learn by doing: They research their own articles, interview sources, photograph news events, and interact daily with their community. Through an ongoing "dialogue" with Harlem, they encourage accountability in their schools, political districts and neighborhoods. In the process, they develop specific skills including desktop publishing, database management, digital camera technology, electronic messaging, web design and mass communications.⁵⁵

The website has undergone a number of rebirths over the course of this research project: from attractive but basic HTML coding, to a simple community calendar, to its current status as an interactive site, Java-enabled in some areas, including the front page, which contains eye-catching images as well as a scrolling box for the "latest headlines." A sidebar contains links to the other areas of the site, including community, arts and culture, writing arts, a photo gallery, "she thang" (for young women), life in the city, and an international area.



HarlemLive

HarlemLive is notable for the community spirit that infuses the writing, and for enabling its participants to come to terms with many of the social, political, racial, and cultural issues that affect their lives. In the Community section, articles have included "Protest against Rockefeller Drug Laws," "Summer Youth Job are a Must," and "Central Park Jogger Criminal Case."

Elsewhere in the Community section (an archive of well over a hundred articles, almost all of them with photographs) are profiles of area businesses, nonprofit organizations, schools, parks, and community leaders. The range of material that HarlemLive covers in youth-submitted stories, essays, articles, reviews, columns and artwork is impressive, as is the general level of maturity with which subjects are covered. As an example of a youth-directed enterprise that speaks for, with and to often-marginalized youth, HarlemLive is a model enterprise.

Street-Level Youth Media (<http://streetlevel.iit.edu/>) is an interesting example of an "analog" institution (in this case, one that provided video cam-

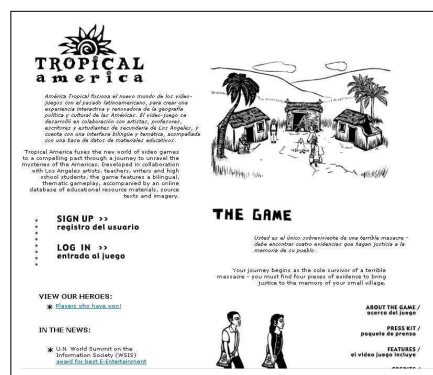
eras to neighborhood youth “to document the world as they saw it”) that has also managed to incorporate digital technologies as well. According to the organization’s mission statement,

Street-Level Youth Media educates Chicago’s inner-city youth in media arts and emerging technologies for use in self-expression communication, and social change. Street-Level programs build self-esteem and critical thinking skills for urban youth who have been historically neglected by policy makers and mass media. Using video production, computer art and the Internet young people address community issues, access advanced technology and gain inclusion in our information-based society.⁵⁶

The expansion of the organization’s strategies to include digital tools was based on a desire to explore new ways of fulfilling its storytelling mission. Beginning with just one Apple computer, Street-Level members began building Web pages about themselves and their community. “Without realizing it, Street-Level became one of the first organizations in the country to offer new technology access to urban kids,” the website reports.⁵⁷

The Street-Level website offers examples of a variety of youth media, including a collection of Macromedia Flash animations and Web interfaces; a “box set” of streaming videos (arranged thematically, covering community, identity, culture, conflict, place, and creativity); and websites developed by participants, each of which is colorful and expressive.

The standout site is the YESS Project (<http://streetlevel.iit.edu/youthprojects/yessproject/yessproject.html>), which represents a skillful handling of issues surrounding American identity among Chicago immigrant populations. While the Street-Level site is not open to outside participation—on-site members produce all of the work—it certainly serves as an inspiration for local projects elsewhere. Regrettably, the website does not appear to have been updated since 2002. Among the offerings on the website of OnRamp



Tropical America

Arts (<http://www.onramparts.org/>), a community digital arts organization in central Los Angeles, is “Tropical America” (<http://www.tropicalamerica.com/>), a free online video game that explores 500 years of Latin American history. Twenty-five students from L.A.’s Belmont High School (with an almost 90 percent Latino population) spent two years working with teachers, professional writers, artists, and designers to create a bilingual video game that teaches about “culture whitewashing” of race and identity. The game’s title is a tribute to the Los Angeles mural by renowned Mexican artist David Alfaro Siqueiros, which was whitewashed in 1932 due to its controversial content.

As the students, most of whom were immigrants from Mexico, Guatemala, and El Salvador, worked through the phases of game design, they created characters, developed symbolic icons, and wrote game narratives. In the process, they mastered Flash animation and Photoshop image-processing skills and learned about digital video and audio production. And almost without knowing it, they developed a better understanding of themselves and their cultural roots. As On-RampArts co-director Juan Devis (who gave the students lectures on thirteen episodes of Latin American history) points out, “Many of these kids didn’t have a sense of where they were in the world. That’s very dangerous, especially as an immigrant. If you don’t have an anchor, you are easily swept away by the dominant culture.”⁵⁸

The final product was a creative Flash-animated game that begins after the *El Mozote* massacre in El Salvador in 1981. Players explore historic encounters between the Americas, meet historical and mythical characters, and conduct conversations using word balloons, all to achieve the ultimate goal: to find four pieces of evidence that bring to light the memory of the massacred village. During breaks in the game, players are taken to an online database of educational resources, texts, and images, where they can learn more about the characters, icons, and events they've just encountered. In the process, players gain new appreciation and respect, both for the students' efforts and for the richness and complexity of Latin American history. Visitors from the United States, Morocco, France, the United Kingdom, China, and Canada have all played the game.



Tolerance.org

CTCNet, the Community Technology Centers' Network (<http://www.ctcnet.org>), was founded by Antonia Stone, a former public school teacher who started a computer technology center in the basement of a housing development in Harlem in the early 1980s. According to the group's website, CTCNet exists because "in an increasingly technologically dominated society, people who are socially and/or economically disadvantaged will become further disadvantaged if they lack access to computers and computer-related technologies."⁵⁹ In ten years, CTCNet (first known as the Playing to Win Network) has grown to over one thousand community technology centers that in their words serve as "stepping-stones to opportunity, equality and civic participation for youth, senior citizens, and people with disabilities, low-income people and new residents."⁶⁰

On the CTCNet website, visitors can find an online directory of member centers by state, as well as Web links and contact information for each group. Also available on the site is a large collection of reports, case studies, articles, and newsletters that provide valuable research and advice to technology centers nationwide. The CTCNet website is not geared to youth, and as such does not formally belong in this study. On the other hand, it does serve as a directory for young people who are interested in finding technology centers in their own backyards. The CTCNet website also serves as an online portal to the priceless work that the CTC Network undertakes both online and offline, as young people—along with adults, seniors, and persons with disabilities—gain technical and communication skills that will serve them well in both their private and their civic lives.

8) Tolerance and Diversity

From online auctions of Nazi memorabilia to the "World White Web" of the Aryan Nation Brotherhood, the Internet has given new voice to those who would gladly stifle the voices of others. Much less heralded are those examples of individuals and organizations that have seized upon the Web as a platform for promoting tolerance, understanding, and respect among diverse groups and cultures. Yet these websites do exist, many created by or for youth.

Tolerance.org (<http://www.tolerance.org/>) is an elaborate, beautifully organized Web project of the Southern Poverty Law Center that seeks to equip its audience with information and skills to promote tolerance and fight hate. Unlike sites offering one-size-fits-all programming—which risk losing their audiences through lack of focus—Tolerance.org arranges its content according to age level, with separate sections for parents, teach-

ers, teenagers, and children. The teen section, “Mix It Up” (<http://www.tolerance.org/teens/>), is highly interactive, promoting an activist approach to fighting segregation and “social boundaries,” whether based on race, religion, or school-based clique. As of fall 2003, the homepage was urging students to observe a Mix It Up “Lunch Day” (November 18) by sitting somewhere new in their school cafeteria—“out of their comfort zones”—and talking to someone they didn’t know. This content was repeated in the site’s “Act Up” section, which presents ideas and guidance on taking action to create change in the school or community. In the “Load Up” section, the site offers “tons of free stuff for you to download” to build a student activity into an event, including posters, stickers, iron-on transfers, and even recorded online raps.

Also on the homepage in October 2003: a 17-year-old questions the celebration of Columbus Day; an 18-year-old shares how she deals with stereotypes associated with mental illness; a 16-year-old recognizes her own prejudices as she confronts the reality of the Holocaust; and an editor of Tolerance.org offers pointers for college students whose lives mix activism and academics. These articles are drawn from Mix It Up’s collection of over fifty activist “stories” by and about student activists who are working for change. This material is moving and impressive—a helpful antidote to those who would see youth as apathetic and uninvolved.

Mix It Up also offers a PDF handbook on launching structured “Mix It Up Dialogues” (<http://www.tolerance.org/teens/dialogue.jsp>), designed to help participants reach across social boundaries, get to know each other, and gain respect for different viewpoints. Based on a small-group format and run (offline) with a facilitator, the dialogues seek to reinforce a basic civic value: that “Participants don’t have to agree with each other, but they do learn how to find common ground.” The or-

ganization also makes it clear that their “dialogues” don’t end with talk: “They’re also about taking action—changing personal behaviors and working on collective projects to improve the climate at your school.”

Also on the website are polls encouraging students to question social cliques and boundaries, sign-ups for an email newsletter, and applications for small grants from Tolerance.org for school or community projects. Overall, the website combines guidance, inspiration, concrete materials, and open-ended opportunities for students to “identify, cross or challenge social boundaries.”

Stop the Hate (<http://www.stopthehate.org/>) identifies and addresses hate crimes in the state of Massachusetts. In a subject in which emotions run high and rumors run rampant, Stop the Hate, created by the Massachusetts Governor’s Task Force on Hate Crimes, offers authoritative information, much of it derived from official State of Massachusetts documents. Content is organized to serve the needs of four broad constituencies: students, educators, law enforcement officials, and the community at large. Stop the Hate’s student section (http://www.stopthehate.org/get_involved/students/) features a tripartite arrangement: *Empower* (with background information on hate crimes and civil rights), *Act* (with examples of anti-bias projects), and *Inform* (with suggestions on speaking up against hatred). In the *Empower* section, a comprehensive definition of “hate crimes” is provided, stories are told of actual hate crimes committed by high school students (some of which are graphic and very disturbing), and a brief page entitled “What is COOL” encourages students to think critically about stereotypes they encounter in the media and to confront others who are prejudicial and hold “hateful attitudes.”

The *Act* section presents the Massachusetts Students Civil Rights Team Project, a public school program that organizes high schools to “prevent

hate-motivated crime and harassment.” The Project sponsors retreats and conferences and calls upon school “teams” to hold weekly or bi-weekly meetings. Also in the *Act* section is a brief outline of “Seven simple things you, your friends and your family can do to act now!” *Inform* offers a 20-page resource manual from the Governor’s Task Force entitled “Preventing Youth Hate Crimes, The Official Word,” which provides suggestions and examples for school hate-prevention programs, directories of resource organizations and anti-hate websites, and a hate crime bibliography. Elsewhere on the Stop the Hate site are a form for filing hate crime reports online, links to other online resources, a discussion forum (used little since its inception), a newsletter, and feature articles. As added inspiration, the site provides profiles of students, educators, law enforcement officials, and community members who have been active in the anti-bias movement.

The Oakland-based Diversity Works (<http://www.diversityworks.org/>), working primarily offline, offers training programs that prepare youth to educate their San Francisco Bay Area peers on how to improve race, ethnic, gender, religious, and socioeconomic relations. Each year, Diversity Works trains young people to be “peer educators” who reach other youth through diversity workshops. Most of the Diversity Works website focuses on getting interested youth the information they need to apply for the training programs.

Diversity Works’ richest online resource is not openly advertised. Rather, it can only be found by clicking on the large red chili pepper on the upper left-hand corner of the site’s homepage. This curious icon links to a “Curriculum Resource Manual.” A cautionary note describes this manual, clarifying why it is hidden:

Anti-oppression work is deep and complex and should not be approached lightly. We encourage

educators to contextualize any of the activities in this manual and to use them at times and with groups who are ready to take this “next step.” We also encourage you to take plenty of time for this work and to order activities from lower risk to higher risk so that learning may take place in a safe and conducive environment.⁶¹

The difficulty in locating the training manual reflects the organization’s hesitancy to use the Web as a venue for teaching. These qualms speak to the potential weakness of the medium in helping people deal with volatile, internalized feelings. Rather, that kind of work, in the view of Diversity Works, needs an offline presence to provide the feedback and sensitivity that only face-to-face interaction can ensure.

Gender and sexuality, as other focal points of discrimination in our society, have generated their own online anti-discrimination activity. About-Face (<http://www.about-face.org/>) is a website that “promotes positive self-esteem in girls and women of all ages, sizes, races and backgrounds through a spirited approach to media education, outreach and activism.”⁶² This “spirited approach” began in 1995 as a protest against commercial depictions of women. Citing super model Kate Moss as the poster child of “starvation imagery,” About-Face launched a poster campaign of its own, plastering “Emaciation Stinks” posters around San Francisco.⁶³ In subsequent years, About-Face initiated other poster campaigns questioning and spoofing the imagery and the motives of the fashion industry.

By placing its work online in a “Gallery of Offenders” and a “Gallery of Winners,” About-Face has expanded its reach far beyond San Francisco. In addition to all of its eye- and mind-opening imagery, About-Face includes a “Making Changes” section with links to online and offline resources and ideas for fighting back. In exposing the false uniformities of Hollywood and Madison Avenue, and in celebrating the sheer variety of contemporary women, About-Face pursues

such goals as encouraging “a healthy skepticism about media images and the messages of popular culture,” empowering “young people to feel confident about their individuality, their abilities and their bodies,” promoting education on the subjects of “sexism, lookism and the obsession with weight in our culture,” and using “playful and original ideas to generate cultural change.”⁶⁴

The Internet has also played an instrumental role in forging a sense of identity and community among lesbian and gay youth, who are often isolated and geographically dispersed. They can form an “invisible” group, for they have no distinguishing features such as the skin color, clothing, or language that distinguish other minority groups. The act of coming out—of acknowledging one’s sexuality to one’s community—makes an otherwise private issue public. As gays and lesbians demand their rights, sexuality becomes a civic issue.

Out Proud (<http://www.outproud.org/>), the website of the National Coalition for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual & Transgender Youth, is a model of depth and interactivity, a worthy example for any youth civic site, regardless of its topic of concern. Out Proud is well organized and easy to navigate, serving the needs of its target audience

by providing advocacy, information, resources and support. Our goal is to help queer youth become happy, successful, confident and vital gay, lesbian and bisexual adults. We provide outreach and support to queer teens just coming to terms with their sexual orientation and to those contemplating coming out. We let them know they’re not alone by helping them find local sources of friendship and support.⁶⁵

Much of the site content suggests how to approach the private-turned-public issue of youth homosexuality. The “School Resources Library” (<http://outprouud.org/schooll.html>) provides “a range of tools to help make schools safe and supportive.” Statistical information provides data on

the importance of supporting gay youth in school and social environments, as do articles illustrative of homophobia and detailing schools’ responsibilities to protect gay students from hate. Additional information is provided on starting gay/straight alliances in middle and high schools, as well as resources for making educational environments more open and welcoming to students of all sexual orientations.

The site is rich in resources designed to assist youth in coming to terms with their sexuality. Most notable of these is “Outpath” (<http://www.outpath.com/>), a searchable archive of over 650 personal narratives about coming out which includes an opportunity for visitors, both youth and their families, to add their own stories to the collection. In addition, a FAQ section, with answers to over 100 questions, allows users to search for questions and answers by gender, age, and keyword, and to ask their own questions. The emphasis throughout is on providing solid, reassuring information in areas of sexual identity and offering simple navigation in pursuit of answers to complex questions. Out Proud also promotes civic activism, providing information on how to organize support groups in school. The result of Out Proud’s online approach is social action through developing awareness, acceptance and respect for one’s own rights and those of others.

From educating young people about hate crimes and the law, to promoting action to overcome “isms,” to building pride, community, and social change for minorities facing discrimination, pro-tolerance and pro-diversity websites make a difference that can be felt both online and off.

9) Positive Youth Development

Navigating the passage from childhood to adulthood is difficult and complicated. Numerous organizations have sprung up to help, teaching both personal and citizenship skills and “prepar[ing]

youth to contribute to their communities and to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood through a structured, progressive series of activities and experiences.”⁶⁶

“Positive youth development” programs—those that focus on youths’ strengths and assets, as opposed to deficit-based approaches that focus on problems—have long been a part of our civic fabric, operating after-school troops, clubs and centers for children and teens. Their websites often serve as online brochures or newsletters for the offline programs. The website of Boys and Girls Club of America (<http://www.bgca.org/>), for example, is packed with information on the organization’s programs, but offers a minimum of virtual involvement. Similarly, the Boy Scouts offer an extensive online presence (<http://www.scouting.org/>) with plenty of information about the organization, but few opportunities for interactivity. A companion site, *Boy’s Life* magazine (<http://www.boyslife.org/>), makes somewhat better use of Web technologies; it includes online opinion polls and an opportunity for boys to propose questions they would like to ask the president, along with a variety of downloadable crafts projects.

Interestingly, some of the groups focusing on young women seem to make better use of the Web. For example, in contrast to the Boy Scouts’ limited interactive offerings, Girl Scouts (<http://www.girlscouts.org/>) has a separate “Just 4 Girls” section (<http://jfg.girlscouts.org/>) with online activities, advice, and other resources for girls through age 17, which allows online submission and display of essays, poetry, book reviews, and works of art. Studio 2B (<http://www.gsiec.org/STUDIO2B.htm>) is a new Girl Scout portal for teens, with information and suggestions on issues

ranging from self-esteem to self-defense to learning to express oneself through writing. To take another example, while the YMCA website (<http://www.ymca.net/index.jsp>) serves mainly as a means of locating area Ys, the women’s version (YWCA) (<http://www.ywca.org>) offers opportunities for involvement. It links to the Young Women’s Web (http://www.worldywca.org/young_womens/index.htm), which urges its members to take their place in the virtual world:

This is a place on the web for YWCA young women by YWCA young women. It is designed to provide young women with tools to empower them to develop and use their power to change their lives, their YWCAs, their communities and their world! And how can you participate? Young women, this is your space. ... The Young Women’s web is what we make it, together.⁶⁷



Young Women’s Web

The site announces exchange, internship, and volunteer opportunities; makes available *Young Women on the Move* magazine; offers online discussion forums, and provides downloadable application forms for the YW’s global student exchange program—all in a colorful, youth-friendly format. Its varied pages suggest how rich the results can be when an offline youth organization integrates online resources.

The venerable 4-H offers a multitude of websites that reflect the diversity and decentralization of the 4-H movement itself. In its traditional offline incarnation, 4-H clubs and classes exist in rural and urban schools across the US, allowing young people to work on service projects together and to learn, among other attributes, responsibility, teamwork, leadership, and communication skills. 4-H uses the Web to enhance its offline projects by providing additional information, links, and curricula. National 4-H Headquarters (<http://www.4h-usa.org>) provides links to news and general information about the organization, mem-

bership and volunteer opportunities, resources and curriculum, and related government sites such as the USDA. Among the sites it links to are “Are You Into It” (<http://www.areyouintoit.com/>), a 4-H volunteering website, and the National 4-H Web (<http://www.4-h.org/>), a platform for shared communication and resources designed, according to the banner at the top of the front page, “for youth, by youth.”

SHiNE (<http://www.shine.com/>), which stands for “Seeking Harmony in Neighborhoods Everyday,” describes itself as

a national non-profit organization that uses art, music, technology and sports to engage and empower young people to take a stand, use their voice and impact their world.... Our mission is to help young people develop the tools they need to build self-esteem, embrace diversity, promote social harmony, and practice non-violence.

Directed at youth between the ages of 12 and 24, SHiNE undertakes five core programs. Four of them – events, challenge grants, clubs, and in-school activities – are conducted offline. The website features them, with highlights of achievements by SHiNE teens, and presents news, entertainment and pop-culture information with “a pro-social twist.” Colorful and professionally designed, the site is strong on youth-created content and youth voice. A section entitled “Mingle” includes a chat room, online journals, a poetry area, and a calendar of SHiNE events and activities. Message boards cover such topics as Peace and Non-Violence, Take a Stand, School Daze, and What’s On Your Mind? The section of the site called “The Buzz” features a collection of articles on popular culture and social issues, including discrimination and violence. SHiNE’s Contest section asks youth to consider such issues as self-esteem, diversity, and activism. Winners of SHiNE art contests are featured in the “Galleries.”



While the site is free of banner ads or other promotions, its corporate ties are clear in the contests and events that SHiNE sponsors. As the site explains, “SHiNE partners with a number of cause-minded corporate citizens to further our mission of empowering young people to impact their world.” Those partners include *Teen People*, Procter & Gamble, MTV, AT&T Wireless, Tommy Hilfiger, Eastman Kodak, and the Scholastic Teen Magazine Network, all apparently eager to reap the benefits of “cause marketing” their products to the teen demographic. (Cause marketing is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.)

In contrast to the national scope of these organizations, many youth development projects are locally focused, even neighborhood-based. These organizations are less visible in search engines than are national organizations, due to the reliance on links that guides the search engines’ ranking systems. For that reason, they are probably underrepresented in our study. One local youth development project is the Youth Empowerment Program (<http://yep.cohhio.org/>) of Columbus, Ohio, which works with homeless youth, seeking to “empower [them] by increasing opportunities to take control of their situations while building self-esteem and improving the quality of life through advocacy, leadership & education.” The YEP site, although mainly addressed to adults working with the program, is notable for presenting the perspective of homeless youth through

stories written by the youth themselves. One young participant shares the following about her life:

When we got kicked out of our apartment I had to go stay at my grandma's apartment with my sister, mom, grandma, my aunt (17) and her baby. I was happy to stay with grandma. ...At first I got to go to school but when I got out of school we could not go outside because no one could know we were at my grandma's or she would get kicked out. When school found out they kicked me and my brother out of school. Then I slept... until 11 and watched TV.... I liked my school. I was angry that I couldn't go to school to see my teachers and friends. I wanted to stay at my school but they wouldn't let me just because I didn't have my own house. Now we are not allowed to stay at my grandmas anymore and we have to stay with other friends. If I had to I would take a bus to go to my old school. I miss it.⁶⁸

These first-person narratives spotlight the Internet's ability to give all of us a window into the experiences of disadvantaged youth in America.

Somewhat different from youth development organizations are groups that promote character education. Although sharing many traits with positive youth development, character education focuses on the individual and moral aspects of young people's behavior. According to the Character Education Partnership (<http://www.character.org/>), character education promotes core ethical values and defines "character" to include thoughts, feelings, and behavior. As practiced in schools, character education seeks to develop a meaningful and challenging academic curriculum that strives to develop students' intrinsic motivation. Parents as well as community members are called upon to assist.

Some organizations have attempted to undertake at least part of their character education efforts online. America's Promise (<http://www.americaspromise.org/>) is an effort to "mobilize people from every sector of American life to build character and competence of our nation's youth by fulfilling five promises: (1) caring

adults; (2) safe places; (3) healthy start; (4) marketable skills; (5) opportunities to serve." Established following the Presidents' Summit for America's Future in 1997, America's Promise offers a fairly top-down view of character education, featuring the thoughts of founding Chairman Colin Powell. One notable feature on the website is a Young Leaders section, designed to inspire young people by profiling youth who have used service to make a difference in their communities. Site visitors can use an online submission form to nominate young people to be featured as Young Leaders.

Content of Our Character (<http://www.contentofourcharacter.org/>) is "a nationwide initiative designed to facilitate substantive, public deliberation on ethical leadership, primarily among youth, young adults, and young professionals." The website is built around a downloadable publication, *Content of Our Character: Voices of Generation X*, which grew out of a gathering of young people in Durham, North Carolina in 1998. Participants "quickly came to recognize that, beyond their differences and disagreements, they share a vision of ethical leadership—leadership that is guided by strong principles, infused with a humane and generous spirit, and courageously committed to the common good."⁶⁹ Content of Our Character encourages young people to hold forums and launch dialogues on the ethical dimensions of social issues. The website provides a downloadable "ethics toolbox" (http://www.contentofourcharacter.org/data/ethics_toolbox.pdf) with resources and reflections on such topics as respect, human dignity, citizen responsibility, volunteering, and mentoring, as well letters written by adult leaders encouraging young people to grow into their potential as the next generation of leaders.

My Hero (<http://www.myhero.com/home.asp>) allows visitors to "explore historical and contemporary heroes" from "peacemakers such as Nelson Mandela to scientific visionaries such as Albert

Einstein.” Visitors to the site are invited to create their own Web pages honoring their personal heroes in any of more than 20 categories. In collaboration with Childnet International (<http://www.childnet-int.org/>), My Hero also sponsors an online forum (http://www.myhero.com/new_forum/forum_table.asp) on the Internet’s potential as a “tool for peace and hope.” There, young people post their thoughts and ideas on how to use the Internet to create a more peaceful world.

These sites help imbue young people with values, experiences, and skills that will help them grow into responsible, involved citizens. However, as the following section suggests, there is a further dimension to citizen involvement that youth development and character education programs do not, typically, address: activism.

10) Youth Activism

In their intriguing study of civic education programs, “What Kind of Citizen? The Politics of Educating for Democracy” (discussed more comprehensively in Chapter 6), Joel Westheimer and Joseph Kahne distinguish among three types of citizens: the “Personally Responsible Citizen,” the “Participatory Citizen” and the “Social Change Agent.” In the words of Westheimer and Kahne, “... if Participatory Citizens are organizing the food drive and Personally Responsible citizens are donating food, Social Change Agents are asking why people are hungry and acting on what they discover.”⁷⁰ Youth activism, rooted in this vision of social change, is alive and well on the Web. Furthermore, it’s clear that the Web—which lends itself to the kinds of informational, analytical, and organizational strategies on which activism depends—has become a fundamental component of many social change projects.

Fight For Your Rights: Protect Yourself (<http://www.mtv.com/onair/ffyr/protect/>) is a collaborative project involving nonprofit organizations

(most prominently, the Kaiser Family Foundation) partnering with a for-profit enterprise (MTV) in a marriage of the intellectual capital and medical expertise of the nonprofit public health sector with the promotional clout and market share of a media superpower. The project melds offline, online, and on-air components in a campaign to inform and empower young people on the issue of sexual health: HIV and AIDS, other sexually transmitted diseases, discrimination, and unintended pregnancy. The initiative includes PSAs, special programming on MTV, online and grassroots components, and an extensive resource and referral service.

FFYR offers a wealth of professionally produced, well-organized and thorough resources on sexual health and advocacy. Among these are “It’s Your (Sex) Life Guide,” a 30-page booklet on birth control, STDs, and related matters produced by the Kaiser Family Foundation and available for downloading, online browsing, or through the mail; interactive guides (via ZIP code entry) to local HIV testing facilities and Planned Parenthood Centers; a sexual health column produced by the SEX, ETC. project (<http://www.sexetc.org/>); a glossary of sexual health terms, and a listing of and links to 14 nonprofit sexual health organizations.

All of this content is presented in the midst of ads for MTV programming and other commercial products (e.g., Dunkin’ Doughnuts, Fujifilm), and never more than a click away, due to banners and icons at the top of every page, from the commercial, mainstream fare of MTV.com. The casual visitor is unlikely to find FFYR from the MTV homepage, since a single reference to the project is buried among more than fifty other links at the bottom of the page. The fact that young visitors can and do navigate their way to and utilize FFYR in the midst of these pervasive commercial distractions is yet another indication that youth both *want* to be and *are* more engaged with civic concerns than they often are given credit for.

Although opportunities for youth contributions to the site are limited, there are a handful of interactive elements. Most notable is the Sex Quiz:

When it comes to sex, everybody thinks they know the score. You know everything you need to know... right? You sure? Prove it: Take MTV's 21-question pop quiz on sex and health, and then tune in to our live special on April 20 [2002] to find out if you know as much as you think (and get schooled if you don't!).⁷¹

Fortunately, the quiz gives immediate feedback in the form of the correct answers and thus is not necessarily tied to the 2002 TV broadcast. Another interactive component is the link to the FFYR message board, which includes ongoing threads discussing both civic and non-civic topics. The majority of discussions relate to FFYR's areas of concern (sexual health, etc.), but threads exist on other subjects as well, ranging from the war in Iraq to *Harry Potter*.

The "Take Action" portion of FFYR is another example of the nonprofit partnerships around which the project is built. MTV partner Advocates for Youth (<http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/ffyr/>) offers young people opportunities to be trained as peer educators, to sign an online petition (directed to the president and Congress) advocating comprehensive sex education rather than "abstinence only," and to access examples of sex education activism, locally and nationally. The FFYR News section, similarly, draws on the headlines and stories produced by KaiserNetwork.org (<http://www.kaisernetwork.org/>) as well as on reports from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and past columns by SEX, ETC.

Whatever the importance of the MTV brand name in attracting visitors to FFYR, the value of the project's content rests in the nonprofit partners who contribute information. In the case of FFYR these partners are exemplary, including (in addition to those mentioned above), Planned Par-

enthood Federation of America, Teenwire, LIFEbeat, and Rock the Vote. However, the emphasis on the website leans heavily toward self-education rather than action, and more towards education-as-action than the type of activism that seeks structural change.

The National Youth Advocacy Coalition (NYAC, <http://www.nyacyouth.org/>) addresses issues of sexual identity and sexual politics from the perspective of "a social justice organization that advocates for and with young people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ) in an effort to end discrimination against these youth and to ensure their physical and emotional well being."⁷² An activist organization as well as an online resource for gay youth, NYAC excels in both capacities. Through its activist menu, visitors can learn how to write elected officials, contact the media, read about legislation and relevant news stories, find helpful resources, and discover upcoming events. Down the left side margin are links to the many resources of the NYAC site, which include large databases of local programs, information on politics, health, and legal issues, and resources for young people in need of help and support.

Perhaps the best example of the website's sophistication is the "Tell the Media" section, which allows users to search (using their ZIP codes) local, state, and/or national media outlets, media organizations, or media personalities, and then to choose up to five media outlets to contact. Once the media outlets have been designated, the user is offered three prepared letters ("Our Community Includes Transgender People," "Racism in the LGBT Community Must Not Be Tolerated," and "Please Give More Coverage to LGBT Youth Mental Health"). The user may edit the prepared message or create an original message, then email or "snail" mail the letter to the selected media outlets.

The official website of the Student Public Interest Research Groups (PIRGs) (<http://www.studentpirgs.org/>) makes outstanding use of legislative material for youth engagement on policy issues. Offline, the Student PIRGs -- twelve college and university chapters of the state-based PIRG organizations -- use telephone campaigns and door-to-door canvassing to encourage public support of specific environmental and social legislation. The website demonstrates how these techniques have been adapted for online citizen lobbying. Each chapter site is organized around a "Top Priority" issue; as of spring 2003, most of the chapter websites featured a clean air issue as their top priority. The sites also give prominent placement to one or two other issues, while a sidebar and links provide information on other environmental and social justice issues. At the end of each, the site links users to actions that can be taken online, including signing online petitions or, more frequently, sending emails to legislators asking them to cosponsor or to vote for a certain bill. Suggested actions entail just "three easy steps": approving or adapting a model letter, signing it electronically, and sending it off with a click of the mouse.

Interestingly, some websites that enlist visitors to lobby decision-makers provide contact information, but not email links. For example, the PBS anti-commercialism site, Don't Buy It (<http://pbskids.org/dontbuyit/>), lists the addresses and phone numbers of many "Government Agencies and Elected Officials" so that young people can contact them about commercialism and other media-related issues, but no online contact information. The "legislative" section of the Students Against Destructive Decisions website (<http://www.saddonline.com/>) offers "Tips on Telephoning Your Representatives" and "Tips on Writing Congress" in addition to specific contact information for all U.S. Senators and Representatives, but again, no Internet-based contacts. These choices may reflect the growing assessment that



Free the Planet

email carries less weight with elected officials than do handwritten letters or telephone calls. Ironically, it is the very ease with which the Internet handles communications that has led to the devaluation of email as a means of lobbying.

Free the Planet! (<http://www.freetheplanet.org/>) is a student organization that works to "hold... polluters and politicians accountable and ensure the protection of our planet."⁷³ An action-oriented organization, Free the Planet! enlists college students to put pressure on corporations whose activities deplete finite resources, pollute the air or water, or otherwise threaten the web of life. It does not back off from controversial issues, nor does it hesitate to name names in its campaigns. This is apparent on the website's attractive homepage, which showcases the organization's latest campaigns. As of October 2003, these included a coalition drive that successfully persuaded BoiseCascade Corporation, "once the world's worst loggers," to protect endangered forests, and a similar but on-going campaign to convince Office Depot to stop logging in old-growth forests. Visitors can link to these efforts or to any of Free the Planet's seven other action campaigns from the homepage.

Free the Planet!'s website rates high for interactivity. Besides the opportunity to send emails to targeted corporations, it also invites the visitor to sign up for a national listserv; participate in regional dis-

cussion boards; download fliers, postcards and organizing manuals; and email comments to the national staff. As much of the organization's work is conducted offline, the website serves as a recruiter for those efforts, a source of information, and an effective means of coordinating a complex agenda.

The Web also features a number of sites that reflect a new spirit of activism, asserting youth rights for their own sake. Among them are Americans for a Society Free of Age Restrictions (<http://www.asfar.org/>), which fights the minimum voting age, curfew regulations, and other laws that limit the freedom of young people; Power to the Youth (<http://www.youthpower.net/>), which decries having to "spend our childhood and adolescence responding to bells, whistles, multiple-choice tests, and report cards," and which vows to "work to increase the decision making power of students, and increase the academic freedom given to students"; and No War on Youth (<http://www.colorlines.com/waronyouth>), a response to California's Proposition 21, the Juvenile Justice Initiative.

A site that stakes a claim for youth in the new media is Peacefire (<http://www.peacefire.org/>), a website and mailing list begun in 1996 to "represent the interests of people under 18 in the debate over freedom of speech on the Internet."⁷⁴ Under the provocative tagline on its front page, "You'll understand when you're younger," Peacefire vows to support "open access for the Net Generation." (This website is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.)

Given their results-oriented *raison d'être*, most activist websites do not concern themselves with promoting open debate or all-sided civic discourse. This can be seen as a pedagogical weakness; one-sided presentations or a strident tone will not necessarily lead to complex discussion of the issues. At the same time, many activist sites provide detailed factual information that young people are

unlikely to find in classrooms, the mainstream press, or even libraries; as such, they may be valuable tools in preparing at least one side of a debate. In any case, activist websites perform an entirely different function: engaging youth in do civic action. To that end, they utilize the Internet effectively for coordination among organizational members, outreach to a broader public, and online lobbying by the convinced.

The dozens of websites discussed in this chapter illustrate much about the civic Web: its rich diversity, the creativity it embodies, and the formidable commitment to drawing youth into active citizenship. Yet there are many questions that this chapter does not address. The most important, perhaps, is how *effective* this online material is in delivering results. Does it stimulate young people to become active in their schools, communities and their nation? Moreover, what vision of citizenship do these websites foster in the minds and imaginations of youth? We will return to these and a variety of related issues in Chapter 6. But before we do, in the next three chapters, we examine at closer range selected online civic efforts and the lessons they afford. Chapter 3 provides a comparative study of two powerful websites, YouthNOISE and WireTap, following their paths from conception to launch, and identifying issues both have faced in adapting the Internet as a tool for youth civic engagement. Chapter 4 examines the online response of youth to the terrorist attacks of September 11, focusing on the role of message boards in creating a forum for discussion and debate. And Chapter 5 looks at trends in online youth activism (including such sites as Peacefire and United Students Against Sweatshops), examining how key features of digital communication are influencing the strategies and tactics of a broad spectrum of advocacy groups.

Notes

¹ W.K. Kellogg Foundation, “e-Philanthropy v2.001: From Entrepreneurial Adventure to an Online Community,” April 2001, <http://www.actknowledgeworks.net/ephil> (24 June 2003).

² Network for Good and the Bridgespan Group, “A Report to the 2003 Online Engagement Conferences,” Mar. 2003, <http://www.networkforgood.org/npo/> (23 June 2003).

³ Center for Media Education, *TeenSites.Com: A Field Guide to the New Digital Landscape* (Washington, DC: CME, 2001): 58-75.

⁴ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., vol. 3, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989): 254-55.

⁵ Center for Civic Education, “National Standards for Civics and Government: Introduction,” 1994, http://www.civiced.org/stds_toc_intro.html (25 Oct. 2003).

⁶ Benjamin Barber, “The Politics of Education: An Interview with Benjamin Barber by Scott London,” Afternoon Insights WYSO-FM, 14 Dec. 1992, <http://www.scottlondon.com/interviews/barber.html> (17 May 2003).

⁷ Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse And Revival Of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001): 19.

⁸ Derek Okubo, “Civic Education: Life-Long Learning for Life-Long Civic Participation,” National Civic League E-mail Newsletter, Nov. 2002, <http://www.ncl.org/cs/articles/okubo7.html> (17 May 2003).

⁹ Our search for youth civic websites made no presuppositions about the ideological nature of the websites we would find, nor was any political or ideological litmus test applied. However, our routine search procedures uncovered very few youth-focused websites reflecting a conservative political or social outlook; rather, most held a noticeably liberal perspective. Concerned that we might inadvertently be introducing an ideological bias into the study, we took deliberate steps to locate more conservative-leaning youth civic sites. These included searches for “youth activism conservative” on Google (<http://www.google.com/>), the Google Web directory (<http://www.google.com/dirhp?hl=en>), and the Dogpile meta-search engine (<http://www.dogpile.com/>). Links were then pursued from the websites that these searches returned. The Yahoo! Directory (<http://dir.yahoo.com/>) was searched but yielded no results for “conservative youth activism” or “conservative student activism.” One rich vein of conservative youth thought that is available on the Internet is reflected in the websites of conserva-

tive college newspapers, the proliferation of which constitutes a virtual cottage industry. However, a study of those papers would have required that we also examine the corresponding trend among liberal college newspapers. Since that would have been tantamount to launching a whole new research study, we regretfully decided not to pursue it.

¹⁰ Center for Media Education, *TeenSites.Com*.

¹¹ Keyword searches resulted in volumes of data, especially when terms as general as “volunteering” were used. To narrow the search, CME started with a broad term (volunteer) and conducting progressively more specific searches: volunteer + literacy, volunteer + literacy + youth, etc. In general the keyword search turned up more sites than we were able to examine. We concluded that the keyword approach would only be useful for the young person looking for a volunteering opportunity, if that person were clear in his or her objectives and knew how to narrow a search.

¹² We pursued two directory trails in Google: Kids & Teens>teen life>issues, and society>organizations>volunteering. Others may be found in Altavista under “More listings” and in Lycos under “More topics.” Directories tend to lead the user to national sites as opposed to local ones, probably reflecting the way sites get placed in search engines—for example, according to the number and nature of links to the site, its traffic volume or in exchange for payment. Some search engines offer regional listings.

¹³ Although 6 percent of the sites in our sample were created by individuals, it is impossible to specify what percentage of these individuals were youth. Additionally, we were unable to identify the organizational status of 13 percent of our sample.

¹⁴ Constance A. Flanagan and Nakesha Faison, “Youth Civic Development: Implications of Research for Social Policy and Programs,” *Social Policy Report* 15, no. 1 (2001): 3.

¹⁵ Some civic categories were not included, such as health, education, religion, and arts and culture.

¹⁶ M. Kirlin, “Civic Skill Building: The Missing Component in Service Programs?” *PS, Political Science & Politics* 35 (Sept. 2002): 3.

¹⁷ National Public Radio, “Civics Lessons beyond the Classroom: Volunteering May Not Teach Students about Problems’ Roots,” 2002, <http://discover.npr.org/features/feature.jhtml?wfld=905341>; S. Keeter, C. Zukin, M. Andolina, and K. Jenkins, *The Civic and Political Health of the Nation: A Generational Portrait* (College Park, MD: The Center for Information & Research on Learning, 2002).

- ¹⁸ <http://www.idealists.org/mission.html>.
- ¹⁹ <http://www.serviceleader.org/vv/examples.html>.
- ²⁰ <http://action.rockthevote.org/action/index.asp?step=2&item=10044>.
- ²¹ <http://www.teenpolitics.com/about.html>.
- ²² "About Us," GenerationVote.com, <http://www.generationvote.com/vnews/display.v/ART/2002/04/05/3caf1c2cd5571>.
- ²³ <http://www.naacp.org/work/voter/ycvoter.shtml>; <http://www.bigvote.org/byv.htm>.
- ²⁴ <http://www.kidsvotingusa.org/itworks/itworks.asp>.
- ²⁵ Based on figures from 2000. Independent Sector, "Giving and Volunteering in the United States 2001," <http://www.independentsector.org/programs/research/GV01main.html> (27 Oct. 2003).
- ²⁶ 2000 Cone/Roper, "Raising Charitable Children Survey," reported in The Association of Baltimore Area Grantmakers, *Encouraging Youth Philanthropy*, http://www.abagmd.org/info-url2444/info-url_show.htm?doc_id=48834.
- ²⁷ In 2001, 75 percent of 18-to-35-year-olds contributed, on average, just under \$700 annually. In comparison, 83 percent of 36-to-55-year-olds donated just over \$1,200, while 90 percent of those 56 and older gave an average of \$1,537—nearly twice that of the youngest cohort surveyed. "Survey Finds Americans More Generous Last Year," *World Vision*, 23 Apr. 2002, http://www.worldvision.org/worldvision/pr.nsf/stable/20020423_barna.
- ²⁸ Independent Sector, "Giving and Volunteering in the United States 2001."
- ²⁹ Network for Good and the Bridgespan Group, "A Report to the 2003 Online Engagement Conferences."
- ³⁰ <http://www.thehungersite.com/cgi-bin/WebObjects/CTDSites.woa/358/wo/Tk2000Lv200YE50082/3.0.49.1.0.1.0.3.0.CustomContentLinkDisplayComponent.0.0>.
- ³¹ http://www.YouthNOISE.com/site/CDA/Search/search_results/?keywords=just+1+click.
- ³² Council on Foundations, *Foundations Fund America's Future*, <http://classic.cof.org/newsroom/media/presskit/fundthefuture.pdf>.
- ³³ Curtis W. Meadows, Jr., "Permian Basin National Philanthropy Day," 20 Nov. 1998, <http://www.learningtogive.org/permian.shtml>.
- ³⁴ Domenica Marchetti, "Charity's Youth Movement: Children and Teenagers Take on Nonprofit Leadership Roles," *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*, 9 Jan. 2003: 8.
- ³⁵ http://www.youthcommunication-vox.org/about_us.html.
- ³⁶ Interview with Rachel Alterman Wallack, 26 Nov. 2003.
- ³⁷ <http://www.dosomething.org/sitepages/index.cfm?formid=155>.
- ³⁸ <http://www.globalresponse.org/eca/current.html>.
- ³⁹ <http://www.globalresponse.org/camphist.htm>.
- ⁴⁰ http://www.unicef.org/voy/cgi-bin/zdisc.cgi?show_ssoc_date_all_all_2003-01-16-1426-7033.
- ⁴¹ http://news.pacificnews.org/news/view_custom.html?custom_page_id=46.
- ⁴² <http://www.youthoutlook.org/archives/mainframe.php3>.
- ⁴³ <http://www.youthcomm.org/FCYU-Features/FCYU-2002-09-2.htm>; <http://www.youthcomm.org/FCYU-Features/FCYU-2002-09-6.htm>.
- ⁴⁴ <http://www.youthradio.org/about/index.shtml>.
- ⁴⁵ <http://www.appalshop.org/ami/tradition.htm>; <http://www.appalshop.org/ami/appalachianhistory.htm>; <http://www.appalshop.org/ami/struggle.htm>; <http://www.appalshop.org/ami/comingofage.htm>.
- ⁴⁶ <http://www.kqed.org/topics/education/medialiteracy/youthmedia/overview.jsp>.
- ⁴⁷ <http://www.kqed.org/topics/education/medialiteracy/youthmedia/index.jsp>.
- ⁴⁸ <http://www.kqed.org/w/ymc/pregnancy/>.
- ⁴⁹ <http://www.pbs.org/merrow/listenup/index.html>.
- ⁵⁰ <http://www.pbs.org/merrow/listenup/psacampaign/index.html>.
- ⁵¹ Interview with Colin Mutchler, Listen Up! Web producer, 15 Dec. 2003.
- ⁵² See, for example, <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/libraries/default.htm>, <http://www.hud.gov/nnw/nnwindex.html>, and <http://www.benton.org/openstudio/>.
- ⁵³ A study conducted at UCLA, for example, claims to show that as of 2001, the digital divide, when measured by the level of education users have attained, was closing. According to a report on the study in the *Washington Post*, "The UCLA study shows that in 2001, about 65 percent of those who did not graduate from high school used the Internet, compared with 60 percent of high school graduates and 80 percent of those with some college education. The previous year, 60 percent of those who did not graduate from high school used the Internet, compared with 54 percent of high school

graduates and 70 percent of those with some college education.” Ariana Eunjung Cha, “‘Digital Divide’ Less Clear,” *Washingtonpost.com*, 28 June 2002, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A63831-2002Jun28> (18 July 2002). As impressive as those gains may seem, they obscure the differing growth rates of technology adoption among the three demographic groups, which hew more closely to the disturbing patterns of the digital divide itself: 8 percent increase among those who did not graduate from high school, 10 percent increase among high school graduates, and 14 percent increase among those with some college education.

⁵⁴ Cha, “‘Digital Divide’ Less Clear.”

⁵⁵ <http://www.harlemlive.org/hlworks/>.

⁵⁶ <http://streetlevel.iit.edu/>.

⁵⁷ <http://streetlevel.iit.edu/aboutus/aboutus.html>.

⁵⁸ <http://www.digitaldividenetwork.org/content/stories/index.cfm?key=266>.

⁵⁹ <http://www.ctcnet.org/>.

⁶⁰ <http://www.ctcnet.org/>.

⁶¹ <http://diversityworks.org/crm.html>.

⁶² <http://about-face.org/aau/mission.html>.

⁶³ <http://www.about-face.org/aau/photos/postering/postering1.html>.

⁶⁴ <http://about-face.org/aau/mission.html>.

⁶⁵ http://www.outproud.org/about_outproud.html.

⁶⁶ National Youth Development Information Center, <http://www.nydic.org/nydic/s1005.htm>.

⁶⁷ http://www.worldywca.org/young_womens/index.

⁶⁸ <http://yep.cohhio.org/stories.htm>.

⁶⁹ http://www.contentofourcharacter.org/voices_of_generation_x.pdf

⁷⁰ Joel Westheimer and Joseph Kahne, “What Kind of Citizen? The Politics of Educating for Democracy,” unpublished manuscript.

⁷¹ <http://www.mtv.com/onair/ffyr/protect/sexquiz.jhtml>.

⁷² <http://www.nyacyouth.org/nyac/programs.html>.

⁷³ “About Free the Planet!” Free the Planet! <http://www.freetheplanet.org/about.html> (19 Oct. 2003).

⁷⁴ <http://www.peacefire.org/info/about-peacefire.shtml>.

Chapter 3

On Their Own Terms:

YouthNOISE and WireTap Reach Out to Youth

In the following pages, we present detailed case studies of two youth civic websites from our study. The chapter presents a narrative account of the design, development, and implementation of each project in order to help deepen our understanding of how these online ventures came about, what they were intended to accomplish, and what challenges they faced along the way. Our research for this section is based not just on an analysis of the websites themselves, but also on a series of interviews with the key individuals involved in guiding the projects from their earliest stages of conception to their “launches” on the World Wide Web, and continuing with their day-to-day operations. Both projects have struggled with many of the same challenges, developing sometimes parallel and other times divergent strategies.

The two initiatives chosen for this analysis—YouthNOISE and WireTap—are not intended to be representative of the many and varied efforts included in our overall study. However, the issues they have faced and the choices they have made are in many ways emblematic of the experiences of the hundreds of nonprofits that are using the Web to engage youth in civic activities.

YouthNOISE

At first glance, YouthNOISE (<http://www.youthnoise.com/>) looks like many of the teen websites dotting the online landscape. Its garish colors, jarring typography, and “sticky content”—from quizzes to top-ten lists to celebrity

spotlights—have become standard fare in the highly commercialized digital teen culture. Upon closer inspection, however, it becomes apparent that YouthNOISE has a loftier mission. Each of these features, and dozens more like them, are tied to social issues (e.g., violence, child exploitation, hunger, homelessness, HIV/AIDS, hate crimes) that the YN organizers hope young people will address. Speaking to teens on their own turf and in their own language, the site urges them to become “NOISEmakers,” using the Web to speak out about issues, take action, and connect with like-minded peers. “We think you’ve had enough of people telling you to be quiet,” declares the site. “YouthNOISE is about maximum volume, it’s about the racket a bunch of young people can generate when they get together to make their voices heard ... about being heard over the negative stereotypes about teens ... a place where you can raise a RUCKUS about things you don’t like, take ACTION and make a DIFFERENCE in issues that affect you.”¹

An initiative of the Save the Children Federation, YouthNOISE has positioned itself as the “one-stop-shop for teen involvement,” an electronic portal that links teenagers to hundreds of causes in their communities, across the country, and around the world. With an annual budget of more than a million dollars, YouthNOISE relies on the same kinds of sophisticated, cutting-edge research used by marketers to design a site that will appeal to teens, combining the technological enhancements of online commercial media with the socially conscious messages of the nonprofit world.

YouthNOISE has received generous grants from major foundations and a number of prominent individual donors. By forging strategic partnerships with some of the most popular and influential players in the media marketplace, the site's organizers have developed a highly sophisticated media and promotion strategy designed to place it in the foreground of teen media culture.

The path of YouthNOISE's conception, design, and launch was by no means smooth, however, having taken place during a particularly volatile era of dramatically shifting sands in both the digital and political landscapes. The developers spent considerable time and money grappling with the challenge of getting the attention of U.S. teenagers, who were already fully immersed in a highly seductive popular media culture. They conducted elaborate market research to probe the concerns, values, and attitudes of teens, devising a number of strategies for captivating their interests and motivating them to action. Armed with this information, they carefully crafted a design that closely modeled some of the most popular commercial teen websites. The result was a highly popular site that has gained a prominent presence on the Web, won awards, and generated continued support from foundations and corporations. At the same time, in its alliances with the for-profit community, YouthNOISE has had to walk a thin line between maximizing its reach and adhering to its mission.

The concept for the project underwent a number of changes during its four-year journey onto the World Wide Web. As Diane Ty, president and co-founder of YouthNOISE explains, its original genesis evolved out of Save the Children's participation in the Presidents' Summit for America's Future, the 1997 event to promote voluntarism and service for youth that ultimately resulted in the nonprofit America's Promise (<http://www.americaspromise.org/>).² Ty was brought to Save the Children to develop and implement the

organization's commitment to the Summit, taking a six-month sabbatical from her job as a marketing executive at American Express. Though Save the Children gave Ty a "blank slate" to come up with a project, one idea was to set up a new domestic organization modeled on the highly successful AARP. With the help of such experts as celebrity pediatrician T. Berry Brazelton, Save the Children explored the creation of a large, grassroots membership organization that could do for children what AARP was doing for seniors, galvanizing a broad-based constituency of young people as advocates on behalf of children and youth policies. Unlike "inside-the-beltway" child advocacy organizations such as the Children's Defense Fund, which is primarily aimed at reaching adults, the new group—tentatively called "Kids4Kids"—would be designed specifically for young people.³ Ty began doing research on the field, and drew up a business plan for a new organization, with elements comparable to those of AARP, including membership cards, a magazine, and a website partner.⁴

Meanwhile, Ty also worked with the Advertising Council on a public service campaign called "Do Good. Mentor a Child," which would become Save the Children's commitment to America's Promise. In order to ensure a "back-end fulfillment" for the campaign, the project secured funding from the U.S. Department of Justice to develop the first database of organizations involved in mentoring. Through her work on this effort, Ty saw the need for an infrastructure to help raise the profile and coordination of the mentoring and youth service field. As she remembers, "there were hundreds of thousands of organizations doing terrific work, but no one knew about them."⁵

As she was developing the public service campaign, Ty continued to explore possibilities for creating an organization focused on children and teens. In the spring of 1999, she had what she

later called a “seminal meeting” with Dan Pelson, the co-founder of Bolt.com (<http://www.bolt.com>), one of the most successful “dot.coms” for teens in the booming online marketplace, where hundreds of new commercial websites were cropping up every day. As she remembers, “This was the first time I was exposed to the power of the Internet.” Pelson explained to her that teens were going online in great numbers, and spending considerable time there. In order to reach them, one had to go where they were. It was clear that in the digital age, the AARP model was not the most effective way to organize young people across geographical and other divides. The best way to reach youth was through their own media culture. With the rapid rise of the Web and the growing power and reach of the dot.com teen market, creating an exclusively Web-based initiative seemed like a more cost-effective and efficient way to reach young people.

By that time, Ty had given up her job at American Express to become a full-time nonprofit entrepreneur, along with her partner in the enterprise, Liz Erickson, another marketing executive from the corporate world. The two women undertook a crash course to learn everything they could about the online market. Ty remembers being particularly impressed with *Net Gain: Expanding Markets Through Virtual Communities*, a study of the new economy by John Hagel III and Arthur G. Armstrong. “The book provided much of the initial ‘theory’ around building an online community of caring teens,” she explains.⁶ Convinced that the Internet was the way to go, Ty and Erickson “threw out” their business plan and began designing a “dot.org start-up.” Through one of Save the Children’s new board members, they were introduced to Tom McMurray, a venture capitalist who had been one of the pioneers of the dot.com market in the Silicon Valley, and an original partner in Yahoo. “He gave us the confidence that our business plan would work,” and urged the pair to begin building a prototype

for the website, Ty recalls.⁷ The plan called for initial start-up funding to come from foundations and major individual donors, relying on earned income from corporate sponsorships on the site to provide ongoing sustainability for the project. This business model was predicated on partnerships with many of the Silicon Valley companies that were expecting large profits in the rapidly growing dot.com marketplace.

Cause Marketing

In forming these alliances, the new venture tapped into the growing interest in and success of “cause marketing,” a practice employed by an increasing number of corporations to link their products to causes and issues in order to build customer appreciation and loyalty. Considered a “win-win” strategy, cause marketing benefits both the commercial and the nonprofit partners. Corporations want the association with well-known causes, and nonprofits stand to gain higher visibility from their connection to a corporate trademark. To the extent that nonprofits are interested in promoting themselves as a “brand,” such joint ventures have become a popular device for achieving greater visibility. And companies are willing to pay nonprofits considerable sums of money for the association, with many creating specific lines in their marketing budgets for cause marketing.⁸ “Linking a brand or product to a charity or a philanthropic organization has become one of the hottest ways to build customer appreciation and loyalty,” explained a December 2000 *Wall Street Journal* article. Many corporations have found the expense associated with cause marketing to be a good investment. “The donor companies believe that even though they share part of their margin with a nonprofit, they still make more money by increasing the volume of sales.”⁹

The technique has become particularly valuable to corporations seeking to market their products

and services to teenagers, who spend more than \$170 billion a year in discretionary purchases.¹⁰ In an increasingly competitive marketplace, companies are pursuing every possible strategy for garnering “brand loyalty” from fickle adolescents. As a 2000 Cone/Roper study reported, “when price and quality are equal, 89% of teens report they would be likely to switch brands to one associated with a good cause,” a 62 percent increase from the year before. Cause marketing is considered a particularly effective practice for influencing girls’ purchases, the report explained, “and girls are more likely than boys to tell their friends about companies that support causes.”¹¹

Armed with these promising figures, Ty and Erickson built into the business plan numerous opportunities for corporations to provide support to the YouthNOISE project by sponsoring contests, surveys, and other features on the site. For example, the “Just 1 Click” feature gives teens an easy way to authorize an online donation to a selected cause. Every time a teen clicks on the icon, the sponsoring company donates 5 cents to the featured cause. To encourage participation, companies also supply their products as prizes. The company donates the money and underwrites the site, providing needed “earned income” to YouthNOISE in exchange for the opportunity to reach a very valuable audience demographic. Teens are urged to email their friends with the link to the Just 1 Click Web page, using the Internet’s unique capacity for viral marketing to maximize not only teen participation in online philanthropy, but also the reach of the corporate logo within the teen market.¹²

In developing the concept and design of the YouthNOISE website, Ty and her associates relied on state-of-the-art tools of market research and trend analysis to determine what would appeal to teens and how best to approach them. While volunteering among teens was on the rise—spurred in part by the growth of service learning

programs in schools—80 percent of teenagers weren’t volunteering consistently. In 1999, the David and Lucille Packard Foundation gave YouthNOISE a planning grant of \$150,000, which included funds for focus group research with teens to learn more about what would motivate them to become involved in voluntarism and activism. As Ty explains, the study identified a “huge opportunity to change the image of service.” Involvement in service, considered by many teens to be too “goody two-shoes and nerdy,” suffered from an obvious “image problem.” But once youth were engaged in the issues, they wanted to help.¹³

To counter the “nerdy” image of activism, the design of the site had to be “vibrant and hip,” capitalizing on the fact that fun and accessible features were driving young people to the Web. Featuring “interactivity, instant access to information, unique insights about other kids, and easy involvement,” YouthNOISE strove to create the right online dynamic for this particular audience. As the Packard research report explained, “The opportunity is to create an entirely new identity for activism by ‘shocking’ kids with a cool layout and graphics that aggressively counter the ‘boring’ stigma and blows the dust off of old notions of activism and uses every opportunity to flex its ‘progressive’ muscle.”¹⁴

YouthNOISE garnered support in 2000 from a variety of sources to get the needed funds to complete the website. The Save the Children board gave the new project \$250,000, which provided funding for additional staff, and enabled Ty to hire 12 teenagers to help refine and rename the original concepts and site features in order to “bring the website to life.” The Packard Foundation, the Surdna Foundation, and the AOL Time Warner Foundation provided grants to the new enterprise, which also secured gifts from such high-profile show business celebrities as Bonnie Raitt and Graham Nash. In addition to securing

corporate cash contributions, YouthNOISE developed partnerships with a handful of prominent new-media and technology companies that promised in-kind support or deeply discounted products and services. These included Vignette, InfoPop, WebTrends, IBM, and AOL Time Warner.¹⁵ U.S. Interactive, a Web services company, agreed to provide \$1.4 million in pro bono services to build the YouthNOISE site.¹⁶ Plans were developed for further intense fundraising from Silicon Valley companies.

The work of conceptualizing and building the new nonprofit online venture was proceeding smoothly and the new website was being readied for a high-profile launch in the fall of 2000. Unfortunately, its intended debut fell victim to a larger set of events, as the highly inflated dot.com market went into a dramatic slide. In the latter half of 2000, the economy of the Web plummeted, as venture capital quickly dried up amid projections of less-than-expected revenues. Hundreds of commercial websites folded, both well-known and obscure online ventures, including a number of highly touted commercial teen websites.¹⁷ The promise of a burgeoning online media mecca—fueled by the seemingly limitless supply of discretionary teen spending—vanished almost overnight. The impact on YouthNOISE was dramatic, particularly since U.S. Interactive, the dot-com company that was developing the site on a pro-bono basis, suddenly went out of business, with only 60 percent of the work finished.¹⁸ As a consequence, the launch was cancelled, fundraising strategies had to be revisited, and the project was forced to regroup.

It took nearly a year to finish the construction of the site. In early 2001, the YouthNOISE staff began working with one of its media partners, *Seventeen Magazine*, on a cross-promotion strategy timed to coincide with the rescheduled launch of the YN website, which was targeted at girls age 13-18. With the help of Save the Children, the magazine commissioned a feature article profil-

ing the lives of four Afghan refugee girls, exiled in Pakistan and fighting for their right to be educated.¹⁹ The article offered a rare glimpse for its female teenage readership into the treatment of women in Afghanistan, a place most U.S. teens knew little about. The magazine referred readers to the YouthNOISE website. “There’s a simple but productive way to show your support of girls’ education in Afghanistan,” explained the magazine: “(1) Visit YouthNOISE.com and click on Just-1-Click. (2) Register. (3) Click once a day. If only 3,000 people click daily for 60 days, YouthNOISE will meet its goal of 200,000 clicks and will then contribute \$10,000 to Save the Children’s Afghan education programs, through which 3,000 refugee girls will get much-needed Peace Packs full of books and supplies.” The Just 1 Click program also offered prizes to three participants picked at random, with the grand-prize winner receiving a *Seventeen* gift basket and two runners-up receiving jewelry.

Dramatic Launch

In cross-promoting its launch with the September 2001 issue of *Seventeen Magazine*, what the site developers had no way of anticipating, of course, was the powerful synergy created by the timing of its official appearance on the Web, its connection with the article on Afghan girls, and the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. With these historic events, YouthNOISE was suddenly thrust into the middle of a cauldron of online youth activity in the wake of the attacks, as teens around the country turned to the Web to connect with their peers, seek understanding, and offer help. A broad spectrum of youth-oriented websites responded with hastily constructed new features to help young people navigate their way through this difficult historical moment. Bulletin boards, chat rooms, and email buzzed with an outpouring of grief and commiseration. Youth used the Web

to offer help to victims, make online donations, and seek mutual support. (See Chapter 4 for a case study of online youth reaction to the September 11th terrorist attacks.)

As Diane Ty remembers, “9-11 became a catalyst” because it created the opportunity for “everything we were working for.”²⁰ The day of the attacks, with Washington, D.C. under siege, YouthNOISE offices were evacuated, and all the staff and interns were sent home. But work was able to continue as a “virtual staff” was quickly re-assembled, communicating through emails and instant messaging from home. One of the summer interns, who had already returned to college, became the ad hoc coordinator of online communication, keeping track of where each IM “buddy” was and making sure everyone remained in touch with one another. Working all day and into the night, they were able to put up content by the next day. They hadn’t planned to launch their email newsletter, NOISEnews, but decided to go with it anyway, hastily pulling together the first issue.²¹ With increased traffic on the site, other new features were added to address the crisis, including an educational piece on tolerance (“Islam, Muslims, Arabs and Intolerance”), stories of youth bravery and commitment such as “Teen Survivors of ’93 Attack Lend a Hand,” and opportunities for YouthNOISE teens to make their own contributions. For example, through the “Memory Chain Memorial,” they could write to other teens who had lost parents or family members. Site visitors were also encouraged to write to policy makers. The website later reported that NOISEmakers used the “Change the Rules” section to write more than 2,500 letters to President Bush.²²

Two years since its dramatic launch, YouthNOISE has maintained its visible profile in the online civic landscape. The project has undergone some difficult financial challenges, brought about in part by the losses suffered by its corporate and foun-

dation supporters, many of whom experienced the combined misfortunes of the crash of the high-tech market, followed by the post-9-11 economic downturn. With continued funding from major foundations—including a recent general-support grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York—the project has managed to survive and grow.²³

The design of the YouthNOISE website is consciously modeled after Bolt.com, one of the most popular websites for teens and also one of the few successful dot-com survivors. Bolt refers to itself as a “communications platform, an online community for teens,” who themselves create over 95 percent of the site’s content. Like other successful online sites, Bolt provides a package of “sticky content” and communications services—from e-mail to instant messaging to chat—designed to serve as the doorway to the Internet and the daily hub of teen online experience. Bolt is also a “membership” site, boasting more than six million teen and young adult members, ages 15 and up. This membership feature allows the site to build relationships with individuals, foster interpersonal communication, and develop profiles of members, tracking their interests and behaviors over time. Member profiles are a key to Bolt’s successful business model. Not only are profiles used to market products and services directly to the website members, but data collected from youth visitors are sold to corporate clients for market research purposes.²⁴

While YouthNoise has incorporated many of Bolt’s fun and engaging features into its website, it departs from the model in several important areas. Like Bolt, YouthNOISE refers to itself as an “online community,” 84 percent of whose members (“NOISEmakers”) are teenage girls.²⁵ YouthNOISE also employs Bolt’s strategy of allowing youth to contribute content, with NOISEmakers generating more than 50 percent of the material on the website. However, unlike

Bolt, YouthNOISE does not require visitors to become members in order to participate in many of its activities, although it does offer a number of incentives to encourage registration. The site has incorporated “member profile and search functionality” to enable members to create profiles of themselves that include not only the causes they support but also “fun” descriptors (e.g., favorite music and hairstyles) in order to connect to “like minded teens.” As a dot-com, Bolt’s *raison d’être*, its core business model, is to provide valuable detailed data about its members to a variety of corporate clients, ad agencies, and brands.²⁶ YouthNOISE has developed a business model that corresponds more closely with its nonprofit mission. However, it is clear from the site’s privacy policy that some of the aggregate information gleaned from teens on the site is made available to corporate clients.²⁷

YouthNOISE’s “fun and accessible” demeanor is consistent with the focus-group research conducted by the site’s developers in 1999. It is clearly designed to attract youth who are already immersed in a highly charged, visually compelling, interactive online media culture. The challenge, however, is to ensure that its “hip and vibrant” style also serves the site’s much more serious purpose. “Our mission,” explains the home page, “is to inspire, connect, and empower youth to help young people everywhere by volunteering, fundraising and speaking out.” The site identifies three goals:

- To inspire you to explore issues affecting you and other young people locally and globally.
- To connect you and your peers—two voices are louder than one.
- To empower you to take action to make change in your lives and the lives of other young people.

Achieving these goals is no easy task. The adolescent years are a critical time of identity development, when teens are very “self-focused” on their own emotional issues, their image and appearance, their relationships, and a constellation of other personal concerns.²⁸ As YouthNOISE’s 1999 focus-group research found,

All teens we spoke with seem to live in a somewhat isolated “bubble” of self in terms of their view of themselves, their outlook on the world, and their concept of time. This “bubble” affects their interpretation of relevant issues where relevance is defined as “what affects me” and “proximity” to an issue is a key factor.²⁹

As the report explained, this self-obsession, a normal part of the adolescent development process, is itself a “cause,” one that teens are already pursuing with

consuming interest, deep conviction, and tenacious energy. This “cause” is the *Cause of Self* or the pursuit of self-identity (Who am I? How do others see me? Who am I becoming? How do I figure this out? How well will this identity serve me? How can I improve this identity? What about the competition?)³⁰

Much of youth culture reinforces this intensely personal focus, particularly advertiser-supported media, which bombards teenagers with pitches for an array of products designed to exploit the anxieties and desires that characterize this age group. The introduction of the Web and other interactive technologies has forged even more intimate relationships between the consumer culture and teens. Through personalized, one-to-one marketing, interactive media can tailor their content and their commercial appeals to the most intimate needs, behaviors, and desires of the individual consumer.³¹

At the heart of YouthNOISE’s design is a set of strategies for presenting social and political issues that are often distant, complex, and abstract, in

terms that are relevant to teens' daily lives. To do this, the website creators have first had to find ways to hook teens, by offering them something that meshes with their prevailing mind set, taps into their needs and desires, and fits within their predominately narrow, self-focused perspective. The task then is to shift their attention so that they can begin seeing themselves as part of a larger, global, political and social world, and ultimately to prompt them to take meaningful action in that world. Market research has played a central role in addressing this challenge, which Ty admits remains a struggle.

Framing for Youth

YN staff have conducted "user-testing" to examine the scope of the issues with which teens are likely to become involved. This research has shown that teens tend to be "multi-issue" focused, and can become interested in many causes, not just "kids' issues." But it has also demonstrated that issues need to be chosen and framed very carefully if they are going to resonate with a broad base of young people. It is particularly difficult to generate interest among U.S. teens in the kinds of global issues that might have more meaning for teens in many other countries, and around which Save the Children has organized initiatives. When YN staff tried to promote the issue of land mines, for example, teens in the United States expressed no interest.

So the YN staff developed a strategy of framing issues in personal terms and then "cross-selling" teens to the broader political and global issues. "We use popular content and commercial distribution as well as catchy phrases to bring young people in," Ty explains. "But the intent is always to cross-sell them into something that's more serious." To illustrate how cross-selling is used, she described an effort YN created around Mother's Day in 2002. "Yahoo had approached us to do a

Mother's Day contest," she relates. "We turned it into 'Mother's Day is coming and I'm broke.' Yahoo did about ten million ad impressions, and they put up a thousand dollars worth of prizes." To enter the contest, teens had to write an essay about why their mothers were so great. YN's idea was to use the contest to "link kids to issues about the values of mothers, what was happening with mothers' lives at risk, et cetera. What we cross-sold was a Save the Children report, funded by the Gates Foundation, on saving newborn lives and the importance of women, every mother, every child. It included a whole push on why women are so important to the health and well-being of children."³²

This cross-selling strategy is evident throughout the website. For example, a sports story covers more than mere on-field exploits: "World Cup Soccer Kicks Butt and Makes NOISE: During the span of a 90-minute soccer match, 375 youth will be infected with HIV. Find out what some players are doing to change that." Summer plans, similarly, are cast in a new, more serious, light: "While you're chillin' by the pool, scarfing down burgers and dogs this summer, millions of people could potentially be dying of hunger. Find out what you can do to help." And this item on a group of college students who will be raising money for breast cancer research by bicycling across the country: "Pop quiz. What do you get when you take 24 athletic college coeds, add sun and lots of NOISE? Hint: It's not the new MTV beach house."

YouthNOISE is also tempered with a think-globally-act-locally pragmatism. While raising consciousness on various issues, YN is careful not to raise expectations unnecessarily. The advice offered is practical, the proposed solutions achievable, and the overall tone of the site inspiring, but also realistic. Although the YN home page presents a jumble of items—What's Hot? What's Going On? 3 Second Quiz, and a dozen others—

the site is basically divided along two broad paths: Explore (“The 411 on issues affecting teens”) and Take Action (“Ways you can be the solution”).

Explore presents issues in a variety of formats, including quizzes, debates (drawn from topics on YN’s discussion forums, or “NOISEboards”), first-person accounts (some of them from the Diary Project website), and celebrity profiles (e.g., Kevin Richardson of the Backstreet Boys discussing environmental causes, or Julia Roberts on Rett Syndrome, a neurological disorder affecting infant girls). Although much of the material is written or compiled by YN staff, a number of sections (e.g., In My Words, True Story, Walk in My Shoes, and seven others) are written by YN members.

YN’s NOISEboards (which are moderated according to a posted “Bulletin Board Rules of Play,” purging the postings of such objectionable material as profanity or hate speech) are moderately active. Although it is rare for any one topic to generate double-digit replies (only 4 of 50 recent topics, for example), a larger number do manage to attract triple-digit page-views (17 of the 50). Using technology developed by Infopop, one of YN’s corporate partners, YN members can be alerted whenever a new posting appears in a given topic (either via e-mail or on the user’s MyPop Web page), a feature that theoretically should increase traffic in the NOISEboards.

While Explore examines a broad range of social issues by tying them to popular youth themes, the Take Action section views these problems through three solutions-oriented lenses: Raise It and Donate It (fundraising), Lend a Hand (volunteering), and Change the Rules (speaking out). All three areas, moreover, offer both immediate and longer-term solutions—that is, steps that can be taken online at that very moment, as well as “tool kits” that explore philanthropy, voluntarism, and social action in much greater, step-by-step

detail; “Get Local,” a Zip Code-entry search engine for local volunteer opportunities, operated by VolunteerMatch; and “Connect to Congress,” an automated email program run by Capitol Advantage. The tool kits, meanwhile, are remarkably detailed plans, broken down into manageable components that range all the way from bake sales and car washes (under fundraising), to do-it-yourself service learning (under volunteering), to walk outs and sit ins (under speaking out). YouthNOISE also offers grants: “funding for youth-led projects focused on improving members’ community or schools. Grants will be awarded in amounts ranging from \$100-\$1000,” administered in partnership with the Center for Youth as Resources (<http://www.yar.org/>).

The site’s strategic partnership with AOL Time Warner has been particularly important to its continued viability and reach. The company hosts the YouthNOISE website, providing valuable services for which most of its partners are charged substantial fees, for free or at very low cost. This arrangement also ensures YouthNOISE a prominent place on AOL Time Warner’s very popular Teen Channel, which, as Diane Ty explains, has placed YouthNOISE on valuable online “real estate.” AOL also provides its filters to the YouthNOISE site, ensuring that expletives are automatically deleted.³⁵ YouthNOISE partners with a number of popular teen websites, magazines, and teen media, including the Ad Council, AOL Time Warner, Alloy, Bolt, Infopop, McCann-Erickson, NetIQ, Vignette, and Yahoo.

In keeping with its role as a gateway to the broader youth civic community, YouthNOISE has forged partnerships with many nonprofit organizations, “aggregating” content from their websites and other materials for inclusion on the YouthNOISE site. Ty considers this another “win-win” practice, generating benefits on both sides. As she explains, “many local nonprofits don’t have [separate] teen websites, largely due to cost. YN uses

their content, provides links to their sites, and, if they have actionable activities, e.g., scholarships, etc., we'll highlight them." These arrangements serve to aggregate not only content but "eyeballs" as well, enabling all the sites featured on YouthNOISE to gain access to the teen audience. Before linking to another nonprofit, YouthNOISE staff do "a ton of research" on the organization, to be sure they are familiar with the organization to which they are sending their teen members. Although this process can be very time-consuming, Ty believes it is necessary. YouthNOISE also gets written permission from everyone whose content they use and to whom they link. They usually offer a "negative option—"if we don't hear from you in x days, we will assume you agree."³⁶ In the past two years, YouthNOISE has posted links to nonprofit groups that concern themselves with, among other topics, teen pregnancy, AIDS, teen suicide prevention, voting, and the war in Iraq. Teen Advice.org, for example, allows young people the chance to be online counselors for other teens on a wide array of topics, while Rockthevote.org encourages politically-minded youth to organize or promote music events in conjunction with voter registration.

While some people might worry that YouthNOISE's "one-stop-shopping" strategy could upstage other nonprofits, giving YN a kind of exclusivity on teen online activity, Ty sees it differently. "We're the category killer, we're the Staples or Barnes and Noble of the youth online nonprofit community," she points out. Like these companies, YouthNOISE "sells all the brands but under one roof. But unlike the commercial model, where the category-killer is winner takes all, in the nonprofit model, it's 'winner shares all.'"³⁷

YouthNOISE has just begun to develop a formal study to measure the effects of its content and activities on individual teens. To service its cause-

marketing partners, the website uses tracking technologies and other "functionalities" to produce detailed reports for internal use and for corporations. These technologies can provide a great deal of information on a range of indicators, including the number of registered users, page views, visitor sessions, and frequency of repeat visits—all valuable information for companies seeking to evaluate the worth of their involvement with the site. According to YouthNOISE staff, these tools have already demonstrated that YouthNOISE engages teens. The project now plans to adapt some of these same methods into a sophisticated system for probing and assessing measurable indicators of civic engagement. Findings from this "outcome evaluation research will guide how YouthNOISE refines the site and marketing activities to most efficiently help more teens achieve deeper levels of engagement, and hence deliver a greater Social Return on Investment (SROI)." The purpose of the research—for which YouthNOISE was still seeking funding in July 2003—is "to understand more fully (1) what types of action teens take through YouthNOISE? (2) more importantly, *how* does YouthNOISE drive that engagement?"³⁸ If this research can be carried out, and the results shared with the larger youth civic community, as the YouthNOISE staff intends, it could prove valuable for others seeking to use the Web as a tool for youth civic engagement.

Like many other nonprofits, YouthNOISE partners with Network for Good, an industry-sponsored portal developed to facilitate online contributions. Originally created by AOL, the venture is now supported by Cisco, Yahoo, and Time Warner. Despite the considerable spending power of teens, however, online donations from this valuable demographic have failed to roll in to YouthNOISE. Ty's explanation for the failure of teens to donate to the site is that they have little access to credit cards. Though a number of efforts were developed several years ago to facili-

tate online purchases by teenagers, most folded during the dot-com crash. The project is exploring a variety of options, including a range of new earned-income strategies, to help ensure support for its ongoing efforts.³⁹

WireTap

“Youth in pursuit of the dirty truth,” reads the digital masthead of WireTap (<http://www.wiretapmag.org/>). Billing itself as “... the independent information source by and for socially conscious youth,” the online magazine showcases “investigative news articles, personal essays and opinions, artwork and activism resources that challenge stereotypes, inspire creativity, foster dialogue and give young people a voice in the media.” WireTap’s feature articles are sometimes edgy and controversial, designed not only to inform, but also to spark debate and spur activism. The website covers a range of progressive issues, including race and gender, global capitalism, the environment, politics, youth rights, and the media. Though its stories are often presented as first-person narratives, they always offer a broader, political perspective as well.

WireTap is at once a forum for youth debate, a training ground where young journalists can learn the basic skills of reporting and writing, and a global publication in which young people can express their experiences and perspectives—unfiltered and unmoderated—to the rest of the world. WireTap also serves as a portal for a variety of progressive political advocacy groups and youth media organizations, providing “a new generation of writers, artists and activists a space to network, organize and mobilize.”⁴⁰

The website shares many features with YouthNOISE. Though it is less glitzy, its design is equally “hip and vibrant,” calculated to be attractive and engaging to its target audience of

teens and young adults. Like YouthNOISE, WireTap is grounded in a sophisticated understanding of how the Web functions, employing some of the same state-of-the-art technologies, software, and strategies. Both sites take good advantage of the interactivity, communications, and community-building capacity of the Internet, and have built into their sites a variety of ways for youth to create their own content and communicate with their peers, although WireTap does not promote the kind of individual peer-to-peer relationship building fostered by YouthNOISE.

YouthNOISE and WireTap also share the mission of reaching and engaging young people and encouraging them to take meaningful action in the political and civic arena. But the two projects approach this challenge very differently, reflecting their respective philosophies, intended audiences, and objectives. With its strong roots in cause marketing, YouthNoise has developed strategic alliances with corporate as well as nonprofit partners, targeting a predominantly female teen audience. To attract a broad, often unengaged teen population, the website’s carefully crafted messages are designed to translate adolescent obsessions about self and identity into broader concerns, and to prompt a set of clearly defined actions.

WireTap also frames many of its issues in ways that will resonate with the personal concerns of young people. However, its older audience of college-age as well as high school youth, its strong progressive political stance, and its more overtly activist orientation stand in sharp contrast to the more neutral and balanced approach of YouthNOISE. Both websites encourage involvement in a variety of nonprofit organizations, community activity, and activist campaigns. But while YouthNOISE offers a smorgasbord of issues from which teens can choose, and provides them with user-friendly tools for taking individual actions, WireTap functions as more of an organizing tool, focusing its attention on a select group

of political causes and mobilizing activist youth to take collective action.

WireTap is an offshoot of AlterNet.org, an online magazine run by the nonprofit San Francisco-based Independent Media Institute. Before its launch as a website in 1998, Alternet had been a syndication service for weekly alternative newspapers. Begun in the mid-eighties, its purpose was to enable the editors of weekly alternative newspapers to share content with one another. But, as Don Hazen, IMI's executive director and executive editor of AlterNet, explains, that business model never worked because most of the alternative papers were local and had little interest in news articles, features stories, and other content that didn't originate from their own communities. Hazen, who had been publisher of *Mother Jones* magazine before he took over Alternet in the 1990s, recalls being frustrated with the "oodles of content" aggregated by the service that no one seemed to want. But then "all of a sudden the Web came along and it was 'bingo!' We can have our own magazine. We can have a website, we can distribute this information and make it available." Working with RealNetworks (Rob Glaser's Seattle-based streaming-media service that has a history of supporting progressive causes), Hazen and his colleagues created a website, giving new life to the fledgling syndication operation. Now all of the content that had languished in the editorial offices of local alternative papers could be made available online to anyone who wanted it. In its new online incarnation, AlterNet quickly grew from a few thousand visitors a month to several hundred thousand, with a reach of 900,000 by 2003.⁴¹ The website has won several awards for its mix of "news, opinion and investigative journalism on subjects ranging from the environment, the drug war, technology and cultural trends to policy debate, sexual politics and health issues."⁴² AlterNet also maintains a database with more than 7,000 stories from over 200 sources.

Within a short time after the launch of AlterNet, plans were underway for a youth version of the online magazine. "Young people were increasingly relying on the Internet for their news and information," recalls Hazen. Since youth had always played an "energetic role in social issues and social change, they deserved their own Alternet," Hazen explains.⁴³ Hazen and his colleagues approached the Open Society Institute, a foundation created by philanthropist George Soros, for the initial funds to develop and launch the online effort. In 1999, OSI agreed to provide \$60,000 for the initial start-up funding for the project, which enabled Hazen to hire one full-time editor and another part-time staff person.⁴⁴

Seeta Peña Gangadharan, the young woman hired to help develop the project, remembers that IMI had realized early on that youth held a key to the future of the progressive movement. At both of the previous Congresses on Media Democracy that the nonprofit had organized, there had been mentoring programs to develop new voices. The concept of an online outlet for these voices fit well within the priorities of the organization.⁴⁵ AlterNet staff were also making plans to expand into a progressive portal, and this project would be the youth version of that portal.⁴⁶

Gangadharan began mapping the field of youth media and youth activism, making connections with other nonprofits, and developing a database of organizations. What she found was that "there was a lot of independent youth media production going on," but no way to get it out to the larger community "We didn't have our own portals to collect the energy," she recalls. The way she saw it, there were many participants but "the party hadn't been thrown yet. The gathering hadn't occurred yet." Gangadharan envisioned the project as an online community as well as a publication, and she studied everything she could about chat rooms, Web rings, and other Internet features to incorporate into the design of the

website. “The idea was to agglomerate youth media and activism,” she explains. “That was the hook.” While it was to be a spin-off of AlterNet, the new venture was designed to have “a very distinct voice and character.” Although “Alternet had to be journalism,” Gangadharan explains, the youth website could be much more advocacy-focused. In her mind, the new project was not intended for a wide audience. “I assumed that both the readers and contributors would be like-minded people,” she remembers, “all of them interested in social justice causes.”⁴⁷

One of the goals of this “R & D process” was to establish “content partnerships” with youth media outlets in order to aggregate content from a variety of sources. In her survey of youth media, Gangadharan cast a rather wide net, seeking out not only the nonprofit projects but also some of the dot-coms that were setting up shop on the Web to target teens and youth. In many ways, it didn’t matter whether they were dot-coms or dot-orgs. What mattered, Gangadharan explains, was “Are they addressing issues that concern young people in a way that is compelling?”⁴⁸

Because Gangadharan left in the fall of 1999 to go to graduate school, she was not around when WireTap “went live” in January 2000. By May of that year, WireTap had published more than 30 articles, and Twilight Greenaway, a recent graduate of Antioch College, had assumed the editorship, a position she continues to hold. WireTap’s budget has never been large, ranging from \$125,000 to about \$165,000 per year, and the project has also been able to generate additional support from the Surdna Foundation.⁴⁹ Don Hazen describes the operation as “a one-and-a-half- to two-and-a-half-person staff with the interns coming in during the summer and generally several people working part-time, along with a pool of money for writers.” Even with a small budget—especially when compared to projects such as YouthNOISE—WireTap has been able

to draw on the experiences, infrastructure, and resources of its parent publication, Alternet.⁵⁰

Youth Rights

WireTap features articles on a range of front-burner issues, including “access to health care, reproductive choice, issues around gays and lesbians, and dress codes,” all of which are of particular interest to youth. “One of the initial priorities for the site,” explains Hazen, “was to develop consciousness among young people about their rights.”⁵¹ The emphasis on youth rights was something very important to the Open Society Institute, which has long supported a number of initiatives in this area for years. With articles such as “Bullied: When Kids Confess Under Duress,” “Young White and Criminal,” “McCensored: Student Punished for Criticizing McDonalds,” and “Man on the Street: Have you ever been kicked out/restricted/asked to leave/treated badly just because of your age?” WireTap has covered a range of youth rights and juvenile justice issues.

While other youth websites might focus solely on registering young people to vote, WireTap goes a step further, joining the chorus of youth rights advocates who are calling for laws to lower the voting age. In its May 2003 issue, for example, WireTap published an article written by the president of the National Youth Rights Association, which is advocating for a voting age of 16:

Politicians listen to those who vote, they respect those who vote. Why is it that in the last decade state governments have begun to take away driving privileges from youth and not from the equally dangerous elderly population? Because seniors vote, youth don’t. Why is it that politicians fight to provide the best medical benefits and hand-outs to seniors while stealing funds from education? Because seniors vote, students don’t.⁵²

As Hazen explains, “There has been a real orientation on the part of the editors to look for personal-voice writing where people talk about their experiences in institutional contexts along these lines. All of the stories have some personal angle to them, personal experience that can resonate with the experiences of the magazine’s intended readers. The goal is to use the stories for ‘consciousness-raising’ by showing young people involved in their own struggles who can serve as role models to other youth.”⁵³ This use of personal voice is also consistent with the dominant style in much of the youth media that Gangadharan had surveyed during WireTap’s development phase. “I recognized that everything we came across in youth media was done with personal voice,” she explained. “That was also what we found the most interesting.”⁵⁴ In a June 2003 article, for example, a 16-year-old girl connects her own personal dilemma with a call for changes in federal workforce laws: “When I couldn’t find a summer job, I thought it was my problem. But as I began to look around, I realized that it’s a national problem.”⁵⁵

The activist orientation of WireTap is evident throughout the site, not only in its articles, but also in other regular features, such as the Youth Media Network, which provides annotated links to over 100 groups and projects in the areas of activism, media, youth organizations, and youth culture. As Hazen explains, the slogan for both AlterNet and WireTap is “Information to Action,” adding that although “it’s kind of cliché, it’s the way we try to differentiate standard, commercial journalism with our journalism. If you read a story, we want you to know at the end of it, should you be interested in finding out more about it, or doing something about it, there’s a link to where you can go.” WireTap’s Take Action page gives readers the opportunity to join a variety of progressive political campaigns. “Are you Pro-Choice?” reads the link to the National

Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League (NARAL). “Sign the pro-choice petition to counter anti-choice forces who have now captured all political power in Washington, D.C. and to secure the promise of *Roe v. Wade* for generations to come.”⁵⁶ On another link, readers are urged to “Find out how you can help to repeal the Rockefeller drug laws.” Another advocate a boycott against Coca Cola: “Read about human rights abuses at Coca-Cola plants in Colombia and see for yourself at: www.prairienet.org.”

Like YouthNOISE, WireTap also provides numerous opportunities for visitors to express themselves on the site. The online Gallery presents user-submitted photography, paintings, graffiti, sketches, cartoons, and poetry (with plans for audio and video presentations in the future). Other opportunities on the site for users to contribute material include a letters-to-the-editor section; reviews of books, movies, and recordings, and seven online forums:

- BlurT—Freestyle, hang out, say whatever.
- Currents—In the News
- Issues—Class, Race, Gender, etc etc...
- Diversity—Discuss issues of diversity here!
- Movies—TV/Movies/Pop Culture
- Music—Music and culture
- ArtAttack—Share your work with WireTap readers

The forums are fairly active, although only a small number of topics within the several forums are active at any one time. A topic in the Issues forum, for example (“Discriminated against just for being young”) attracted some 80 responses over a two-week period. Topics are generally started by WireTap staff (who are themselves under 25), but except for occasional cautions against straying too far off topic or making personal attacks, the discussions do not appear to be heavily moderated.

Other notable features of the site include pages devoted to Opportunities (workshops, camps, festivals, grant programs and other opportunities for youth activists), Events (conferences and festivals), and Take Action alerts (timely reminders of various protests and activist movements across the country). The site also makes use of state-of-the-art functions designed to maximize visibility and presence on the Web. These features can sometimes be costly, although prices have fallen somewhat in the wake of the dot-com crash. However, according to Hazen, they are essential and well worth the added expense. “We have not spent any money on marketing, because our marketing is all viral,” he explains.

Viral marketing is fast becoming a standard feature on many nonprofit as well as for-profit websites.⁵⁷ The most common device, well in evidence on WireTap, is a prominent link encouraging visitors to “email this article to a friend.” Making that process “as easy as possible is crucial,” Hazen explains. “People who come to Alternet then do the work for us because of the articles they want their friends to see, or this place that they’ve adopted as their own.” Because of the Web’s unique diffusion capabilities, conventional marketing strategies, such as placing an ad on AOL, are not necessary, Hazen says. “There are a lot of things that you can do—tricky stuff that you know when you’re in the Web world—so that you find yourself popping up in a lot of places, and more and more people come to your site.”⁵⁸ The use of “meta-tags” is one particularly effective technique. As one expert explains:

Meta-tag keywords consist of text coding which is hidden from normal view and located within a specially designated portion of the HTML code which generates the Web page. Web page designers use this hidden HTML code to designate keywords which are communicated to search engine software. This is an important associational tool for the Web page.⁵⁹

WireTap articles routinely contain meta-tags, ensuring their increased visibility during Web searches.⁶⁰

One of WireTap’s biggest challenges has been to balance two of its core goals—journalism and youth development—which are sometimes in conflict with each other.⁶¹ The project makes a special effort to recruit and train young people to contribute to the publication, running ads in various progressive and youth publications, and actively soliciting contributions from visitors to WireTap. The official guidelines are clear:

WireTap is always looking for new writers and artists to add to the site. We are happy to review all submissions from young people but we are most likely to PUBLISH writing that:

- is generally respectful and socially responsible
- is written in a personal voice
- is well researched and carefully written
- addresses social and political issues from a youth perspective
- has an activist, or “what are you going to DO about it?” spin to it
- seeks to include those who have not traditionally had a voice.⁶²

But by using the online venture for training, WireTap also runs the risk of young people making mistakes. Though WireTap staff members have made a serious effort to work directly with each contributor, providing editorial guidance and feedback, it has not been easy to develop and maintain a strong stable of young writers. Most of the writers are college students, although a few are in high school. The pay is very low—usually between \$25 and \$50 per story—and, as Twilight Greenaway explains, “Often writers will only produce one or two stories before they burn out.”⁶³ Understandably, there have been problems with the quality of the output, which can jeopardize WireTap’s journalistic reputation and undermine the publication’s other goals of reaching a broader audience and being taken seriously within the field. Hazen remembers one particular article, where

“something happened too fast and had allegations of facts that were way off.”⁶⁴ These kinds of incidents can be embarrassing and troublesome, from time to time generating tensions within the WireTap staff. Some editors have had less tolerance with the sometimes-slack standards of young writers, who often resist editorial “interference,” insisting instead on unexpurgated contributions of the “authentic” youth voice.

Twilight Greenaway has a slightly different approach to the problem. She understands very well the tension between encouraging an unfiltered youth voice and providing editorial guidance. In her experience, both goals can be achieved, but it takes a good deal of work. She feels that the notion of an editor being contrary to freedom of expression is a “false dichotomy,” believing that it is possible for youth to work in partnership with adults, who can help them develop their own voices. This often means that they will need to “have their sentences changed” in order to make them more clear, but such editing does not amount to an abrogation of free speech.⁶⁵ It is somewhat ironic that a publication that promotes youth rights and urges young people to take on the established institutions of authority has had to face its own problems of youth resistance to the rules and practices of the publishing profession.

The staff has developed initiatives to help address these problems. As Hazen explains, “One of the ways that we’ve dealt with this is we’ve created a new section for creative writing and we’re treating the main page as journalism or opinion and we’re looking to make better connections with creative writing projects.” The site’s “Creative Writing Showcase” recently featured a combination of poetry, short stories, and brief essays, all written in a much more personal style than the articles on WireTap’s other pages, including “Poetry written by an everyday boy thinking about everyday things,” and “Tears,” a short story by

Ivan Raczycki, which captures the personal horror of war: “His hands are sweaty and dirty,” the story begins. “The blood from this young soldier’s forehead intersects the salty tears coming from his misty eyes. His first killing was not a happy thing...”⁶⁶

WireTap has also created a summer training program in which interns (“Fellows”) are paid stipends to receive concentrated, hands-on training, along with opportunities to write articles for publication in the magazine. The project employs paid technical interns to do website design and management, working with a nonprofit that recruits and trains youth from less privileged backgrounds.

Like many other groups involved in youth civic media, WireTap staff members admit that it is not always easy to assess the impact of their efforts. Twilight Greenaway explains that one method they’ve used is to conduct readership polls. They have already completed one and are planning to do another. “We did a readership survey at the end of 2001,” explains Greenaway, “and it was very informative. We learned, for instance, that our readership was split down the middle, gender-wise, that we were skewing older than we’d originally hoped (the largest group was college-aged, between 19-22) and that less than 20 percent of our audience was made up of people of color. But that was a year and a half ago and we’re really excited to get some new numbers.”⁶⁷

Meaningful Action

According to Hazen, another challenge is developing meaningful actions for youth to take. “Unfortunately,” he observes, “the options are often limited. You can send an email to your member of Congress, or you can make a phone call or write a letter. It’s often in a legislative context.

But for many young people there's a lot of cynicism about the efficacy of those actions." He believes it is important to begin developing broader definitions of civic engagement and to "be more creative about suggesting ways people can do things—even things like having reading groups together, or discussion groups, or anything that gets people talking to each other." WireTap's discussion and message boards are designed to do that, but, as Hazen acknowledges, the project hasn't had enough funding to staff these operations adequately. "It's always an economic issue," he explains, "because they always work better if they've got two people hands-on paying attention to them. With a small staff and a small budget, they don't get as much attention."⁶⁸

WireTap was still in its first year of operation when the dot-com market went into its downward spiral in late 2000. But this turn of economic events was not viewed as a disaster, as it was by the developers of YouthNOISE, who were more dependent on the plentiful coffers of Silicon Valley for a significant portion of their support. As Hazen comments, all of the hype over the dot-com boom and the subsequent media hand wringing over its demise "basically hid what was really going on the Web. The Web was continuing to explode and doing the things that we all knew that it should be doing. The mass media only defined the Web by its commercial measures. And when you couldn't make money from it, and when all of these companies fell flat on their face and then the market crashed, there was this illusion that the Web had crashed with it, but, in fact, it has continued to grow. More people are on it, more diverse audiences, more young people, more people use it.... People are considerably better informed because of the Web."⁶⁹

In its annual announcement of "New Media Heroes," AlterNet ran a February 2001 story hailing the emergence of the "Post-Dot-com Era." "What happened is no great mystery," explained the article:

Hype had triumphed over reason for long enough, and finally reason came back to kick hype in the ass. Today, successful business models for commercial Websites – unless they involve three Xs in a row – are mighty rare. And yet, countless millions of Americans constantly use the 'Net. They go online to e-mail each other, to trade information, to flirt, to be entertained, to create communities, to learn – they just don't buy enough stuff for most dotcoms to make a profit. In other words, the Internet as we know it is more useful for communicating and bringing people together than for commerce.⁷⁰

The real future of the Web, the article predicted, is in nonprofit, civic communications:

... [C]ommunication is done in the public interest, or in the interest of making trouble for the dominant corporate establishment. From the hyper-active listservs used to plan the Seattle protests to five person online support groups, public interest Web ventures are growing in number, influence and scope.⁷¹

In Hazen's view, the Web has entered its coming-of-age period, spurred in part by both the crash of the dot-com market and the 9/11 terrorist attacks. These two converging events have helped to create a critical opportunity for nonprofits to seize the potential created by the digital revolution. "I think 9/11 created an environment—and this is true for young people, too—where people felt they needed to know more about their world, domestically and particularly internationally. That is one of the driving factors in why AlterNet's traffic has grown so much. We thought 9/11 was going to be the peak because everybody came on during a crisis but it has almost doubled since then." AlterNet's increased traffic has also helped attract more young people to WireTap, according to Twilight Greenaway, who reported in July 2003 that the youth website was getting approximately 35,000 unique visitors per month.⁷²

Both Hazen and Greenaway see several trends that they believe hold particular promise for the fu-

ture of the nonprofit Web. One is the advent and growth of blogging. Greenaway sees the phenomenon as an important development for young people, citing the highly popular LiveJournal.com, which has been particularly successful in attracting college students.⁷³ Hazen also points to blogging as a potentially powerful tool for nonprofit Web publications, attributing much of AlterNet's recent rise in visitors to the fact that "a lot of bloggers blog us" and "every blogger has its own traffic." In addition to the increased traffic generated by links from popular blogging sites (a phenomenon discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7), the advent of a new Web publishing format known as RSS (for Really Simple Syndication) now permits individuals to subscribe to news headlines from Alternet (and thousands of other RSS feeds) and retrieve articles at the click of a mouse.⁷⁴

Hazen believes that the Internet has accelerated the pace of both information distribution and activism. As he puts it: "The combination of rapid response, pushing technology, and brand quality can result in someone getting information they can trust, extremely fast, and doing something about it—all within a cycle of less than a day." He cites the success of MoveOn.org as another indicator of the Web's potential for reaching large numbers of people, raising money, and mobilizing political activism. "A MoveOn may have a million names and TrueMajority has 120,000," Hazen observes, "and they are in some ways the leaders of this peace movement because of how quickly they are able to mobilize, raise money—they are the ones paying for the TV ads, they are the ones that are working to get people to lobby for Congress."⁷⁵

Hazen has been frustrated at the small level of support available from the foundation community, where only a handful of funders have invested in youth-oriented media projects. The Open Society Institute, which has been a key sup-

porter of many youth media projects, recently announced it would phase out the program in 2005. "There's almost no money for general support for media," says Hazen, so the strategy he has employed is to raise money on specific issues. "I don't think funders really have a clue about how the Internet and the Web work and they are so slow to change and if they don't do it, that means it doesn't happen. If your funders get all their news from NPR they don't really relate to the Internet." IMI has begun raising money online, and was able to generate \$75,000 in 2002 in online contributions to Alternet. No such effort has been initiated exclusively for WireTap, and Hazen says they haven't tested whether the same strategy would work for youth media. But they might test raising money for WireTap on Alternet, assuming that the average WireTap adults also go to Alternet.

Despite Hazen's optimistic view of the future, he acknowledges that the nonprofit community has yet to develop a reliable mechanism for ongoing sustainability. "There is no business model," he comments. "Funding issues are incredibly challenging. There's very little money out there for the Web, per se. There's really only money for issues that you then wrap around whatever your delivery system is." He suggests that Jonathan Peizer's model of the "dot.corg" (a combination of "com" and "org") is an interesting possibility.⁷⁶ As an example of another hybrid model, in this instance combining subscription, pay-per-view, and advertising-supported content, Hazen cites the online magazine Salon (<http://www.salon.com/>), which has managed to stay afloat by offering its visitors a choice of multiple entryways to the site: a \$30 ad-free annual subscription, an \$18.50 ad-supported annual subscription, \$6 monthly subscription, or a free day-pass for those willing to watch a brief animated ad.⁷⁷

Divergent Models

Both WireTap and YouthNOISE have come up with innovative ways to use the new online medium to reach out to youth and engage them in meaningful civic and political efforts. Because of their respective goals and audiences, the two projects have approached their work somewhat differently, devising separate strategies for framing their issues, enhancing their visibility, and motivating youth to act. YouthNOISE has aligned itself with the commercial sector, modeling much of its design and practices on the efforts of successful dot.com companies.

YouthNOISE shares many of the same features of websites such as SHiNE and Do Something, which have embraced cause marketing. These sites offer young people a menu of possible causes with which to become involved. Though they are somewhat selective in choosing which issues to highlight, they are often careful not to espouse a particular point of view on the issues themselves. Rather, they provide a forum within which youth can make their own choices, as well as a gateway to a range of other organizations with more intentional and focused action agendas. WireTap has much more in common with online youth media efforts such as HarlemLive, Youth Radio, and Street-Level Youth Media. These projects are all designed to educate and train young people in the crafts of media production and journalism, while also serving as an expression of “youth voice” to the larger public. They generally do not shy away from controversy, nor refrain from taking strong positions on the issues, although often it is the individual youth journalists who are expressing these points of view.

Like many of the other web sites in our study, YouthNOISE and WireTap are just beginning to explore ways to assess the impact of their work on the attitudes and behaviors of young people.

At this point, it is difficult to determine how successful these online initiatives might be at reversing the patterns of civic disengagement, and it may be particularly challenging to determine the long-term impacts of their efforts. It could be that YouthNOISE may be more successful at involving youth who are not already inclined toward civic and political activity, compared with WireTap, which is geared more to youth who already have an interest in politics. But it is far from easy to make judgments on either approach at this early stage in their development.

YouthNOISE and WireTap continue to struggle with ensuring their ongoing sustainability, a challenge they share with the rest of the online youth civic community. Instability in the foundation world and swift changes in the digital media landscape continue to make their future—and the future of the entire online youth civic sector—uncertain.

Notes

¹ “About YouthNOISE,” YouthNOISE, <http://www.youthnoise.com> (13 May 2003).

² Convened by General Colin Powell in Philadelphia, the summit called upon all participating organizations and institutions from every sector of society to make “specific, measurable commitments ... to turn the tide for America’s Youth.” “Frequently Asked Questions,” The Presidents’ Summit for America’s Future, <http://clinton3nara.gov/WH/New/Summit/faq.html> (13 October 2003).

³ Diane Ty and Julia Cohen, personal interview, 14 Jan. 2002.

⁴ Ty and Cohen interview.

⁵ Diane Ty, personal interview, 24 June 2003.

⁶ Diane Ty, email to the author, 26 June 2003.

⁷ Ty and Cohen interview.

⁸ Since 1985, the Working Assets nonprofit group has offered Visa or Mastercard credit cards with ten cents of every purchase donated to “to nonprofit groups

working for peace, human rights, equality, education and the environment—at no extra cost to you.” “The Working Assets Credit Card—Plastic with Purpose,” <http://www.workingassets.com/creditcard.cfm> (13 Oct. 2003).

⁹ Ann Zimmerman, “Promotional Ties to Charitable Causes Help Stores Lure Customers,” *The Wall Street Journal* 4 Dec. 2000.

¹⁰ This figure comes from a study conducted by Teen Research Unlimited and was cited in many different articles during 2003, including Annie Groer, “Making the Teen Scene,” *The Washington Post* 27 Mar. 2003, and Jennifer Alban, “Trendsetter,” *Barron’s* 31 Mar. 2003.

¹¹ Cone Incorporated. *2000 Cone/Roper Teen Survey: Influence of Cause Marketing on GenY*, Aug. 2000.

¹² http://www.youthnoise.com/site/CDA/CDA_Page/0,1004,79,00.html (2 July 2003).

¹³ Ty and Cohen interview.

¹⁴ “Summary of KIDS4KIDS Focus Group Research,” unpublished document provided to the author by Diane Ty.

¹⁵ “Just 1 Click,” YouthNOISE, http://www.youthnoise.com/site/CDA/CDA_Page/0,1004,151,00.html (7 July 2003).

¹⁶ Ty and Cohen interview.

¹⁷ Between the months of May 2000 and July 2001, 538 Internet companies closed. Jon Swartz, “Webbys Go On Despite Dot – Bomb Threat,” *USA Today* 18 July 2001, <http://www.newsbytes.com/news/01/168081.html> (20 July 2001).

¹⁸ After filing for bankruptcy under Chapter 11 in January 2001, the US Interactive reorganization plan won court approval in September 2001.

¹⁹ Gayle Forman, “Girls in Exile,” *Seventeen* Sept. 2001: 194–197.

²⁰ Ty interview, 24 June 2003.

²¹ Ty interview, 24 June 2003.

²² YouthNOISE, internal memo, 1 Oct. 2001, provided to the author by Diane Ty.

²³ According to Diane Ty, in mid-July 2003 the site had “over 45,000 registered users representing 165 countries.” Ty also explained that the numbers fluctuate and it is never easy to get a completely accurate count. Overall, however the number of YouthNOISE members was “growing steadily.” Diane Ty, email to the author, 17 July 2003.

²⁴ Dan Pelson, interview, nPost.com, 19 Oct. 2001, http://www.abcsmallbiz.com/advice/bolt_int.html (13 Oct. 2003).

²⁵ YouthNoise daily stats update, July/7/2003 - F: 36,591 (84%), M: 6986 (16%)

²⁶ Center for Media Education, *TeenSites.Com: A Field Guide to the New Digital Landscape* (Washington, DC: CME, 2001).

²⁷ As stated in the YouthNOISE Privacy Policy: “We also collect other information at certain areas of the site (including but not limited to registration, profiles, myNOISE, contests, and submission permission slips) that tells us about who you are and what you like to do: such as your hobbies and interests. This information will not be used by YouthNOISE to identify you individually without your permission. We do, however, place this information in your NOISEmaker profile which is available to other NOISEmakers so that NOISEmakers who share your interests can connect with you. In addition, if you agree to do so, you might be highlighted on the site as a featured NOISEmaker, which would encourage other NOISEmakers to review your profile and contact you.” YouthNOISE, “Privacy Policy and Other Agreements,” http://www.YouthNOISE.com/site/CDA/CDA_Page/0,1004,180,00.html (7 July 2003).

²⁸ Center for Media Education, *TeenSites.Com*: 11.

²⁹ “Summary of KIDS4KIDS Focus Group Research.”

³⁰ Summary Of KIDS4KIDS Focus Group Research.”

³¹ Center for Media Education, *TeenSites.Com*.

³² Diane Ty, personal interview, 26 Sept. 2002.

³³ Center for Media Education, *TeenSites.Com*: 35.

³⁴ Ty interview, 24 June 2003.

³⁵ YN also has two people on staff who filter message boards. Ty and Cohen interview.

³⁶ Ty and Cohen interview.

³⁷ Ty and Cohen interview.

³⁸ YouthNOISE, “Plans for Impact Measurement,” internal memo, 27 June 2003, provided to the author by Diane Ty.

³⁹ Ty interview, 24 June 2003.

⁴⁰ “About WireTap,” WireTap, <http://www.wiretapmag.org/about.html> (13 Oct. 2003).

⁴¹ Don Hazen, personal interview, 30 Jan. 2003.

⁴² “Who We Are,” AlterNet.org, http://www.alternet.org/about_us.html (13 Oct. 2003).

⁴³ Hazen interview.

⁴⁴ Hazen interview.

⁴⁵ Seeta Peña Gangadharan, personal interview, 4 July 2003.

⁴⁶ Gangadharan interview.

⁴⁷ Gangadharan interview.

⁴⁸ Gangadharan interview.

⁴⁹ Twilight Greenaway, personal interview, 27 Feb. 2003; Hazen interview.

⁵⁰ Hazen interview.

⁵¹ Hazen interview.

⁵² Alex Koroknay-Palicz, "Youth Demand a Voice and a Vote," WireTap, 27 May 2003, <http://www.wiretapmag.org/story.html?StoryID=15979> (13 July 2003).

⁵³ Hazen interview.

⁵⁴ Gangadharan interview.

⁵⁵ TiJuana Hardwell, "Where Did All the Summer Jobs Go?" WireTap, 19 June 2003, <http://www.wiretapmag.org/story.html?StoryID=16210> (2 July 2003).

⁵⁶ "Take Action," WireTap, <http://www.wiretapmag.org/action.html> (4 July 2003).

⁵⁷ See, for example, Ralph F. Wilson, "The Six Simple Principles of Viral Marketing," *Web Marketing Today* 1 Feb. 2000, <http://www.wilsonweb.com/wmt5/viral-principles.htm> (13 July 2003).

⁵⁸ Hazen interview.

⁵⁹ Jeffrey R. Kuesster and Peter A. Nieves, "Hyperlinks, Frames and Meta-Tags: An Intellectual Property Analysis," *IDEA: The Journal of Law and Technology* 1998, <http://www.patentperfect.com/idea.htm> (13 Oct. 2003).

⁶⁰ Hazen interview.

⁶¹ Hazen interview.

⁶² "You have stuff to say. We want to hear it." WireTap, <http://www.wiretapmag.org/submit.html> (13 Oct. 2003).

⁶³ Greenaway interview.

⁶⁴ Hazen interview.

⁶⁵ Greenaway interview.

⁶⁶ "Creative Writing Showcase," WireTap, <http://www.wiretapmag.org/creative.html> (4 July 2003).

⁶⁷ Twilight Greenaway, e-mail to the author, 11 July 2003.

⁶⁸ Hazen interview.

⁶⁹ Hazen interview.

⁷⁰ "AlterNet's 'New Media Heroes' Usher in Post-Dot-com Era," AlterNet.org, 22 Feb. 2001, <http://www.alternet.org/story.html?StoryID=10514> (13 June 2003).

⁷¹ "AlterNet's 'New Media Heroes' Usher in Post-Dot-com Era.'

⁷² Twilight Greenaway, e-mail to the author, July 11, 2003.

⁷³ Interview with Greenaway.

⁷⁴ RSS news readers are available free for both the PC (e.g., AmphetaDesk) and the Mac (e.g., NetNews Wire), while Syndic8 (<http://www.syndic8.com>) and News is Free (<http://www.newsisfree.com>) provide extensive lists of available RSS feeds. See Steven J. Vaughan-Nichols, "News You Can Choose," *Washington Post* 6 Apr. 2003, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A32281-2003Apr4?language=printer> (13 July 2003).

⁷⁵ Hazen interview.

⁷⁶ "If an NGO must be structurally modified to become sustainable or profitable," Peizer writes, "then the most promising socially responsible enterprise lies in a hybrid I refer to as a 'dot-corg'—a combination of the best of the dot-org and dot-com worlds. The information and services provided by a values-based entity forms the foundation of its e-commerce and sustainability strategy. Yet these e-commerce activities are engaged in separately from the work of the values-based entity, and the objective of the enterprise is still values-based." Jonathan Peizer, "Two Models for Sustainable Development," Mediachannel.org, <http://www.mediachannel.org/views/oped/values3.shtml> (14 July 2003).

⁷⁷ Don Hazen, "Salon Goes for Broke," AlterNet, 23 Jan. 2003, <http://www.alternet.org/story.html?StoryID=15016> (14 July 2003). See also Beth Cox, "Is the End Near for Salon.com?" Internetnews.com, 17 Feb. 2003, <http://www.internetnews.com/IAR/article.php/1585411> (14 July 2003).

Chapter 4

Youth Respond to September 11th Online

As millions of Americans began their day the morning of September 11, 2001, their world was irrevocably transformed by the actions of nineteen terrorists. First word of the attacks sent people scurrying to their television sets, where many remained transfixed for hours. But as time passed and events transpired, more and more people turned to the Internet for information. Just as World War II unfolded for millions of listeners via radio, and as television brought Operation Desert Storm “live” to millions of viewers via CNN, the September 11 terrorist attack was the first catastrophe that the world audience experienced digitally. In the days and weeks following the attacks, the new digital media not only supplemented but in some ways surpassed and eclipsed conventional media. Americans went online to acquire news, but also to participate in local, national, and global discussions, to donate money, and to volunteer for myriad collective efforts. “There’s been a huge surge in people feeling compelled to make statements about the events online,” creating the potential for “a new level of civic activism,” observed Kirsten Foot, a professor at the University of Washington.¹ In an article posted online a week after the attacks, Phil Noble of Politics Online tagged the Internet “the People’s Channel,” noting that it provided information and services unavailable through offline media channels, doing “what it does best—communicating and connecting.”²

September 11 thrust the youth of this nation into a startling new political and social reality, in sharp contrast to the preceding decade of stability and

prosperity. They found themselves grappling with a new uncertainty about their futures, and questioning both domestic and foreign policies. As Generation Y shared their thoughts and concerns, they turned to the technology that has come to define and to be defined by their generation—the Internet. The online youth magazine, WireTap (<http://www.wiretapmag.org>), summed up the frenetic pace of online activity by youth eager to share and connect with others:

It started almost immediately. Youth went on line to join message boards and email their friends about the events as they happened. Some, like those in New York, were writing in states of fear and shock and posting their words where others could hear about what they were going through.³

Recognizing the events of September 11 as a potentially defining moment in the process of young people’s development of civic identity, and knowing that online reaction could reveal important trends in new media’s potential for fostering civic engagement, we began documenting September 11-related content on youth civic websites within days of the attacks. It appeared, at that point, that civic participation had been reborn. International affairs were discussed everywhere, charitable donations and volunteering spiked sharply, and patriotic sentiment and public service were the tune of the day. We sought to learn whether the Internet could foster this surge in patriotic and altruistic sentiment among youth. If so, how? And could the Internet turn civic sentiment into civic action?

Our research was conducted in three distinct phases. In the first, we completed a brief survey of the ways in which 25 youth websites (listed in Appendix B) addressed the events of September 11 in the immediate aftermath of the attacks. We chose a mix of well-marketed, well-funded websites as well as lesser-known, lower-budget ones. In the second phase, we concentrated on a smaller cohort and analyzed their content over time. (See Appendix B for a list of these 16 sites.) While the first phase of research provided us with a broad overview of the ways in which youth websites addressed September 11, the second phase allowed us to attempt a more in-depth assessment of the views of citizenship and engagement that were arising online. Finally, we monitored a special online youth discussion forum (hosted by GlobalKids.org) in which young people discussed their perceptions a year after 9/11.

This tripartite approach permitted us to develop an overview of online platforms' response to the most riveting public event of recent years. We looked at three areas: the content and issues discussed on youth websites; the opportunities for participation, in debate or in action; and the nature of discourse online. Finally, we asked in what ways the Internet itself, as a communications medium, offered means for promoting civic engagement that could not be replicated offline.

Personal Response to a Public Event

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, young people in this country found themselves struggling to understand the sudden and terrible events and what it would mean to be a citizen of the U.S. in a drastically new environment. Youth websites provided users with a forum for expression and discussion of political and civic issues, offered practical information and resources, connected youth with survivors and families of the victims, and offered information about donating

blood, volunteering, contacting public officials, starting in-school tolerance programs, and many other opportunities. But in the first moments after the attacks, most youth websites reflected emotion. Youth filled the chat rooms and message boards with their shock, pain, fear, sadness, and anger. They shared their personal stories—where they were when they first heard, how they found out. To process their emotions, they produced an outpouring of personal and artistic expression—drawings, political cartoons, photos, video, and poetry—which were posted on youth websites.

Some may question whether this content should be characterized as “civic.” We include it for three reasons. First, most people, adult and youth, responded to the September 11 attacks with powerful emotions in those first days. As more information emerged, youth conversations, like those of adults, evolved. The early, more emotional content was merely the first step in an online “conversation” that rapidly matured. Second, this content reflects the ways that young people engaged with the most important civic event of the day. To the extent that it was different from the pattern of adult response, it is a reflection of the special needs of adolescent identity development. Finally, we postulate a “pre-engagement” phase in the development of civic engagement among youth: a period of learning about civic issues and building a sense of personal connection and investment in them, prior to any readiness to take action. The creative expression that we found on websites corresponds to this “pre-engagement” phase. A deepening analysis came, as we will see, soon after.

Typical of the outpouring of youth self-expression about 9/11 was the website HarlemLive (<http://www.harlemlive.org/>), a youth-produced online publication covering community issues of importance to young people living in Harlem and New York City, which immediately devoted most

of its space to a forum for New York youth expressing their thoughts and feelings. Youth-produced “man-in-the-street” interviews documented the shock of people in the Greenwich Village area. Interviewers asked questions gauged to elicit emotional responses: how New Yorkers were feeling, questions about their loved ones, what they thought should be done. An online montage of photos taken by young people at a sidewalk memorial for the victims included images of the American flag, young people lighting candles, and sidewalk graffiti whose messages ranged from peace and love to anger and fear, from solidarity to revenge.

Emotional expression could also be creative expression. In a poem posted on the Youth Radio site (<http://www.youthradio.org>), a teenager from the Latin American Youth Center’s YouthBuild program expressed both grief and a determination to rebuild:

New York
 They took a bite out of The Apple
 They tried the White House, the Pentagon, and
 the Capitol
 Millions startled, the core was taken
 They took the wings from an angel
 We all shed tears but we will not live in fear
 They took my heart but I still have my soul
*Dañaron mi corazón pero dejaron mi alma...*⁴

On other youth websites, young people could respond to polls asking questions like, “How do you feel about the attacks?” and “How are you coping with the attacks?” Such polls were posted by commercial youth portals like Bolt.com (<http://www.bolt.com/>), an online social community where youth can meet other youth; Teenfx.com (<http://www.teenfx.com/>), an online teen community that describes itself as the “teen advice web portal,” and the nonprofit Do Something (<http://www.dosomething.com/>), an organization with school-based programs that promote community involvement through volunteering.

Several websites provided young people with opportunities to send messages to the families of those affected by the events. On the YouthNOISE site (<http://www.youthnoise.com/>) young people could post messages for families of the attack victims:

This new board is to establish a place where NOISEmakers can write messages to the family and friends of the victims. YouthNOISE will collect all of our messages to create a collage that will be delivered to the family members. So if there is anything you would like to say to those personally affected by the tragedies, please post them in this conference.⁵

Through these and other actions, websites offered a context in which young people’s personal responses to the attacks could take their place as part of a larger public dialogue.

Internet as News Provider

Young people hungered for news after the 9/11 attacks, as did the rest of the population. Youth websites large and small complied immediately, offering young people the raw material needed to become more informed citizens. In the days following the attacks, MTV.com, like MTV television, provided continuing news coverage with links to CBS News and MTV News, information on how viewers could get involved in the relief effort, and a link to the American Psychological Association to help teens cope with loss. ChannelOne.com (<http://www.channelone.com/>), the website for a television network broadcasting to classrooms in over 12,000 American middle, junior, and high schools, dedicated a substantial portion of its news efforts to covering the terrorist attacks and their aftermath, including the possibility of war. Sites such as YouthNOISE, DoSomething, and Wiretap also focused on the attacks, providing in-depth and prolonged coverage and discussion. HarlemLive.org provided

emergency contact information for hospitals and other local resources as well as suggestions on ways young people could help, including donating blood and money.

Over the following weeks, information, analysis, and debate surged to the fore. Websites introduced young people to political and civic issues and offered access to online discussions of these topics in the context of a very real threat to the nation. For many young people, topics such as civic duty, patriotism, discrimination, and military policy became more meaningful as the crisis tested and challenged their notions of citizenship. Visitors to youth websites could read and learn, find additional resources, follow links to news articles, and debate these topics themselves on message boards. Both the flood of information and the opportunity to debate allowed young people to explore and refine their own concepts of citizenship.

Besides providing online access to the same type of news coverage available on TV and in newspapers, websites also served as sources of “alternative” news. JustResponse (<http://www.justresponse.org/>), an online information clearinghouse dedicated to finding a “just and effective” response to 9/11, provided pro-peace information and other online resources. Based around articles written by political and religious peace activists and by students, the site addressed such topics as U.S. policy options and their implications, possible roles for the United Nations, questions about the “just” nature of a war on terrorism, and implications of a war for constitutional rights. While heavy on policy analysis, the site also included some listings of antiwar activities, as well as analyses of media coverage of antiwar youth. Site visitors, both youth and adult, were encouraged to learn, engage in dialogues, reflect, fast, attend vigils, and write letters to promote peace, although the site itself provided no means for doing so other than directing people to other sites.

Alternative news and analysis were not limited to opposition to the war. RightGrrl.com (<http://www.rightgrrl.com/>), a site designed for conservative young women and promoting a pro-life agenda, turned its focus to the September 11 attacks soon after they occurred. It offered content written from a conservative point of view, including such articles as “WWW.IDESPISEAMERICA.COMMIE! Tell the John Lennonites: Let’s NOT Give Peace a Chance!,” “Bush’s Magnificent Speech/No one can ever accuse President Bush of being inarticulate or incapable...,” and “Why War Must Hurt/Military action in response to last week’s terrorism is the recognition that the perpetuation of life—here, the life of freedom—does not happen without pain.”

YouthNOISE provided young people with perhaps the widest range of September 11-related content of all the websites we surveyed. It offered links to the American Civil Liberties Union, the Electronic Privacy Information Center, In Defense of Freedom (a coalition seeking to defend civil rights in the aftermath of the attacks), the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the National Security Agency, and other organizations and government agencies. The site provided information in the form of “factoids” about the attacks and about the United States and Afghanistan, such as “3%: Afghan girls enrolled in school,” and “700,000: Number of war widows in Afghanistan.” It also urged young people to consider larger questions, such as changes in public policy that were likely to affect them, and raised such questions as “Who is making decisions about these post-attack policies? What are the policies? And how can you voice your own opinion about them? What else can you do?” Rather than presenting these solely as rhetorical questions, the site urged visitors to contact Congress, school officials, and community leaders to voice their opinions.

The tension between security measures and protection of citizens' rights was frequently alluded to on youth websites. The Pew Internet and American Life Project found that, in the months following the attacks, people who generally favored "wide disclosure of information online support[ed] government policies to remove that information if officials argue[d] it could aid terrorists."⁶

Youth Websites as a Force for Civic Action

Beyond providing news and facilitating debate following the 9/11 attacks, the Internet was also a tool for moving youth to action. While our study design did not allow us to measure outcomes, we did identify online efforts to engage youth in an active response to the emergency. Through ServeNet (<http://www.servenet.org/>), for example, a program of Youth Service America that connects site visitors with volunteer opportunities through an interactive online database, youth could donate online to relief efforts and connect with related volunteer opportunities. And there were countless other sites that linked to the American Red Cross and victim relief funds, providing youth with opportunities to donate money, blood, and time to various 9/11-related activities. YouthNOISE, for one, linked to a number of assistance organizations, including the Red Cross, the United Way, and the Uniformed Firefighters' Association of New York. It also suggested that its members volunteer to assist with community preparedness for crises. In most cases, voluntary service was performed offline, although donations were often possible online with just a few clicks of a mouse.

Youth were also encouraged to contact public officials. DoSomething, like YouthNOISE, urged young people to turn their emotional and impassioned reactions into civic action, explaining, "Now more than ever it's important to get in-

involved in your community and make a difference."⁷ Among other options, the website encouraged young people to contact public officials with their views on U.S. responses to the attacks, providing a link to Congress.org, where young people could contact elected officials by email.

Several other sites endeavored to promote tolerance in schools and communities. MTV devoted a section of its Fight for Your Rights website to stemming retaliatory violence against Arab Americans and Muslims, providing information about Arab and Muslim culture as well as links to voter registration, volunteer events, and other civic actions.⁸ ListenUp! (<http://www.pbs.org/merrow/listenup/>), a national youth media network, featured online video clips of diversity PSAs and asked viewers to comment on their effectiveness. WireTap linked to a YouthRadio audio clip entitled "Youth Voices From A Nation In Mourning." This clip offered the voices of young adults speaking about media depictions of Arabs and treatment of Arab Americans and Muslims, as well as other political issues. Do Something offered opportunities for youth to "contribute to tolerance and unity in your school" through youth-designed awareness programs.⁹ Youth could also apply for grants to create service projects for their communities.

Finally, for those who subsequently opposed the US military response, sites such as JustResponse, Peace.protest.net (<http://pax.protest.net/>) and the now-defunct Peaceful Justice provided listings of anti-war activities across the nation.

Message boards: Youth Discourse in a Democracy

Of the 26 sites we surveyed, 11 offered online discussion forums. These quickly became a hotbed of intense discussion about a range of deeply-felt issues, including nationalism, patriotism,

capitalism, the global economy, race, ethnicity, and religion. In the first hours after the attacks especially, message board content was intensely personal. Within days, however, September 11-related website content shifted towards finding and offering explanations for the events. Youth posed and responded to such questions as “Why did they do that to us?” “Is war the right answer?” and “Are you patriotic?” In the process, a number of themes emerged: the definition of patriotism; whether the “War on Terrorism,” the war in Afghanistan, and the proposed war on Iraq were “just”; abrogation of human and civil rights, including censorship and First Amendment rights; and tolerance and hate-crime prevention. The shift in focus from emotion to public policy reflected a civic maturation in the discussion. It also provided a clear illustration of the potential of the Internet to engage young people in debate about vital social policy.

In the wake of the attacks, patriotic display surged among Americans of all ages, and it became a common topic of discussion on youth message boards. We looked at youth discussion of patriotism to illustrate the strengths and the weaknesses of online civic debate. Overall, online youth expressed a healthily diverse range of views about concepts of patriotism and whether or how to display patriotic sentiment. In the open, unfiltered forums of message boards and chat rooms, youth were outspoken in expressing their opinions, as the following example, from a Youth Radio discussion, suggests:

So when I see the American flags waving from houses in my neighborhood, I know they're supposed to represent freedom and democracy, and loss of American lives. But I also can't help but think of our sister countries who have lost many lives too by the hands of United States military or funding and weapons. Many people in America are not free. People in countries that are economically dependent on the United States are not free. Children grow up all around the world sur-

rounded by images of death and corruption at the hand of Capitalism. For one day in America, we have stepped into their shoes.

A more patriotic expression could be found in a TeenFX discussion:

I think we are the best country we could be and the government is trying to protect its citizens with honor. We should all be happy that we live in a country where we can wear the clothes we want to where we can have freedoms! The USA totally is the BEST!!!

In the absence of active facilitators, most message boards performed mixed duty in the service of civic discourse. On the positive side of the ledger, they encouraged youth to voice their opinions and marshal their arguments. They also exposed young people to diverse views and encouraged them to respond. In most cases, youth discussion seemed candid and uninhibited, and websites appeared to accommodate diverse viewpoints. However, they rarely challenged young people to distinguish between fact and opinion, logic and non sequitur. Nor did message boards often yield sustained dialogue about points of disagreement. And on some sites, civic discussion was downright uncivil.

It appeared that there was little censorship of postings; comments abounded that could be construed as offensive, insulting, ill-informed, or illogical. Generally, youth postings appeared to be censored only for off-topic comments or for profanity, threats, or overly aggressive language—standard practice for most website message boards. In a minority of websites, discussion was vitriolic. The organizers of PeaceProtestNet, for example, began receiving abusive messages via electronic mail soon after the attacks, and elected to post these messages in an open forum for visitors to read. At their worst, the messages were threatening and violent, as in the following example:

We all know you are an arab and thats why you want USA not to retaliate.... You are a soldier of Usama bin Laden and you are the the nazi soldiers where to Hitler.... I WILL KILL ALL OF YOU ANTI-AMERICANS!! YOU CAN TRY TO STOP A RETALIATION!! BUT YOU WILL NOT STOP US AMERICANS WHO WILL FIGHT FOR OUR FREEDOM!!! WHEN I SEE YOU RALLYING YOUR ANTI-AMERICAN RALLIES NEAR MY STREET, I WILL KILL YOU AND YOUR ANTI-AMERICAN FRIENDS!!!! ... I hope another plane goes right into your house and kills all of you, I am glad we are going to war and i hope all muslims die.... You all need to pack up and get out of this great country.¹⁰

The open forum that message boards offer is clearly attractive to many young people; it responds to their urge for self-expression. Message boards also serve as a testing ground where young people, deeply enmeshed in the adolescent process of identity development, “try on” different identities and ideas. These anonymous discussions also allow youth to express their own thoughts and opinions free of the racial and gender stereotyping, peer pressure, self-censorship, and shyness that affect many youth when interacting in school and other face-to-face settings. Thanks to that appeal, message boards provide websites (especially high-traffic websites) with a relatively low-cost way to generate large amounts of youth-produced content. (Another reason for their proliferation on commercially produced websites is that message boards are also fruitful fields for market researchers, who “harvest” information online about youth tastes and trends.)¹¹

However, the anything-goes participation that is often the rule on unmediated message boards carries with it certain problems. The most obvious of these is “flaming,” the practice (illustrated above) of attacking and denigrating others’ postings. This practice seemed to be more common on commercially-run, unmoderated websites, although we encountered it on nonprofit websites as well when divisive issues arose, whether 9/11

or the war in Iraq. Establishment of anti-flaming policies for message board participation, and the use of moderators who screen content for adherence to those rules (including, interestingly, youth moderators), seemed to work effectively.

A different problem arises at the opposite end of the civility/incivility spectrum: Some youth exchanges seemed to place more emphasis on polite verbal behavior than on clearly-delineated positions or strenuous debate. Where message board participants opt for conflict avoidance, a desire not to offend could interfere with reasoned discourse. Is there a contradiction between online civility and robust debate? In general, online bulletin boards seemed to do better at fostering one or the other, not both. Admittedly, the line between discussion and argument is a culturally-defined one, not always easy to recognize and clearly uncomfortable for some youth. At times, however, it seemed that discomfort arose not so much because of the tone of the discussion, but rather because participants were ill at ease finding that people held truly differing and incompatible ideas. Proponents and teachers of civic engagement may need to assure young people that irresolvable differences will exist in a democracy, and that accommodation of others’ views is not always a sign of successful dialogue.

Online Small-group Discussions

The anonymous nature of message boards, while permitting exploration and experimentation of youth identity, can also contribute to the tendency for online discussion to degenerate into flaming. New advances in social software offer means to minimize harsh, aggressive, or abusive speech. One such promising approach was modeled by the group Global Kids (<http://www.globalkids.org/>) in its online project, “Everything After: A 9-11 Youth Circle,” or E.A.9.11 (<http://globalkids.org/ea911>). As the final phase

of our study of 9/11, we monitored this specially designed forum that sought to bring a higher quality of discourse to youth civic discussion.

E.A. 9.11 invited high school-aged young people to discuss online the impact of September 11 on their lives, one year after the attacks. Special rules governed the process: discussions took part in small groups (the two groups we tracked involved 22 and 15 people, respectively); participants had to register beforehand; and each person began by posting a self-introduction. These steps allowed participants to get to know one another and encouraged them to assume responsibility for their postings. Through these means, Global Kids sought to provide a safe setting where youth of different national, religious, racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds could discuss and debate. Overall, 350 youth from 20 countries created 221 threads and posted 1,775 messages. This diversity of backgrounds increased the chance that young people would be exposed to new ideas and might be moved to reexamine their own values and beliefs as a result.

Other ground rules sought to keep the discussions authentically youth-generated and lively. In contrast to a top-down model in which young people become the receptacles of civic knowledge on a pre-determined set of civic issues, these online dialogues promoted independent thinking by asking young people to introduce and discuss the topics *they* felt were most relevant to them. As the E.A.9.11 website explained, “Young people need a space to set their own agenda and talk about the emotional impact of this new climate, and explore how these events continue to affect their lives.” As a result, most posts directly addressed the September 11 attacks and the civic and political issues arising from them, but discussions of religion, abortion, and educational reform also drew a great deal of attention. Each discussion group was open for a finite period—three to four weeks—to encourage immediate

participation and to cut off the discussion before participants lost interest. The groups were self-moderated.

Our study tracked two discussion groups: Group Two, active between March 5 - 22, 2002, and Group Three, active between March 8 - 22, 2002. The most common topic of discussion in both groups was the “War on Terrorism,” in which young people commented on the responses of national leaders to the attacks and on whether U.S. actions were likely to be effective. Other topics that young people chose to discuss were personal stories (“How Did You Feel on 9.11?” “Where Were You on 9.11?” “Who’s Stressed?”); political events and the threat of war (“Your Message to the Terrorists.” “Do We Want bin Laden ... or Oil? What is the United States’ real purpose for military action in the aftermath of September 11?” “The Iraq Issue. Will a war on Iraq come next?”); and civic identity since 9/11 (“Do Unpatriotic People Piss You Off?” “Generation Next. Have or will young people be changed by September 11?” “Volunteering. Who has volunteered in response to September 11?”) While the idiom of youth may sound casual, the topics were clearly significant.

A striking characteristic of the E.A.9.11 Youth Circles was the consistently courteous tone of the messages posted. Inflammatory postings were non-existent in the two discussion groups we analyzed. Participants frequently disagreed with each other and expressed markedly different opinions, but as they offered their contrary viewpoints, they did so without name-calling or antagonistic language. For example, one participant (“a.j.”) posted, “I am sorry for the victims but the American government tends to get the American citizens (who have done nothing wrong), involved in their warfares.” Another participant responded:

Why shouldn’t the American people be involved in our warfares? The American people were the

ones that were attacked on 9/11—not the government... No matter what the government does, it doesn't excuse the behavior of the terrorists, or give them any more of a right to have done what they did. That would be like saying that because I didn't like the way someone treated me, I had a right to blow them to smithereens. Just my opinion. :)"¹²

In other cases, young people displayed an ability to maintain civility even when dialogue turned more aggressive. In one instance, a participant successfully disarmed a potential escalation between two other participants:

ok "j—" I think you've been rather rude this whole time and I'm seriously offended that you think you can say things like "its okay because only places like new york are going to get attacked" because that's NOT okay. Just because you feel safe doesn't mean that you can't have compassion for your fellow human beings. I think that you should be ashamed."¹³

A third young person intervened, saying "J— is a smart kid and has a few good points. I will admit he does get eccentric at times. Be easy on the kid, maybe he'll lighten up ;)."

Such civility was perhaps a response to the sense of familiarity among the small number of participants in each group. Or the knowledge that they were participating in an experimental forum may have made participants feel that they were under some scrutiny. Whatever the explanation, the tone was markedly more respectful than that on most other 9/11-related message boards.

One aim of small-group dialogue is to improve listening skills and increase tolerance of others' opinions, and some youths attempted to persuade peers to consider other perspectives. In Group Two, for example, a young woman explained that she did not understand why many people identify themselves as "hyphenated" Americans. One participant responded that although one might identify as "American," remembering one's heri-

tage was equally important. Another participant offered the following reply:

I like to believe that America is more of a mosaic rather than a melting pot - a conglomerate of people from all over the world with all different kinds of cultures, not just one people with one culture - thats what makes us unique as a country. However, I understand your point. I think that a lot of the hatred that still exists in this country is perpetuated by the distinctions we make from one another.... I wish that we could move on somehow but I dont really have a plan to do that. If people teach hatred within their families, there's really no way to stop it."¹⁴

Although Global Kids was not able to follow up with participants in this project, several youth posted comments about their experiences that suggest that both listening skills and tolerance were enhanced. As one participant wrote,

E.A.9.11 helped me so much to develop as a person. In school, I don't really get to express myself, because people aren't always willing to listen ... [E.A.9.11] also helped me listen to others points of view and then talk with them about it — instead of just screaming "You're wrong.!"¹⁵

Several young people noted that their exposure to their peers' ideas prompted them to reconsider their values, beliefs, or opinions. Another participant commented, "thanks for giving me a knew look on things. i never thaught that i had a closed mind but i was, thanks for opening it up."¹⁶

Though some young participants were regularly and actively engaged in the discussion, less evident was the potential of these discussion groups to promote full participation or sustained interchange. Some young people became regular participants in the online discussions, and in some cases young people continued the group dialogue after the Youth Circles ended via other discussion group forums, such as Yahoo Groups. In both of the discussion groups we monitored, a handful of participants posted frequently, while

most appeared only once or twice. Nor did the discussions hold the interest of the majority of participants over time. While some youth posted more than once to a particular topic thread and provided momentum to the discussions, most posted only once to a given topic, or not at all. In many cases, the momentum of dialogue within a topic thread either never materialized, or ceased after a brief time.

The falling off of interaction over time and the lack of sustained interaction made the Youth Circles unlikely to provide for a significant number of changes in perspective or opinion. They may, however, be more efficacious in building civic dialogue skills. For young people who were not skilled in listening, negotiation, and perspective-taking skills, these discussions presented clear models in which they could learn from their peers these aspects of democratic discourse.

More complex questions arise when such online dialogue is held to the standards that some academics and practitioners feel characterizes true civil dialogue. Benjamin Barber, for example, suggests that civility in the context of public talk should not be used interchangeably with mere courtesy:

Civility is not about politeness, it is about responsibility, which is why disobedience can also be civil.... Public talk is civil society's special form of power: it sets the agenda for common action and provides the language by which a community can pursue its goods.¹⁷

Barber's concept of civil discourse relies on several factors, a number of which were present in the Youth Circles. All participants had equal access to the dialogue, and all participants were equally encouraged to participate. The benefits of an online venue for this type of civic discussion are clear. The continuing, asynchronous style of communication allowed young people time to think carefully about their peers' comments and

to respond at their own pace. Posting their messages online meant that they could not be easily interrupted or dismissed—experiences all too common for young people. They were freed from the stereotyping that is common in face-to-face interactions. And the dialogues took place among equals: high school-aged youth talking among their peers, unencumbered by adult authority figures, who often talk *to* rather than *with* young people. The Internet's ability to level the playing field for involvement was noted by participants; several young people commented that although they had difficulty expressing themselves in school, they found expressing their views online to be an exhilarating experience.

In terms of results, the E.A.9.11 discussion groups convincingly display young people's ability to identify issues that are important both to them and to society at large, and to engage in respectful exchanges among peers, even in the absence of adult monitors. Whether the dialogue facilitated a move towards action or engagement beyond talk is less clear. Barry Joseph, creator of the E.A. project, suggested that the experience was "not likely" to spur young people to act, given that this was not its purpose.¹⁸ Barber suggests that "Talk that does not foresee action and look forward to consequences is just a game or a pleasant pastime or an intellectual exercise."¹⁹ We take a more lenient view of the subject, at least in the case of youth, recognizing that both the cognitive and the affective processes of relating to civic content are necessary steps for laying the ground for future action. As Joseph pointed out, "Youth expectations shape what youth have to offer society."²⁰ In this case, participation in the E.A.9.11 discussions could help them envision a future of concern and serious discussion of important civic topics.

As the Youth Circles were not designed to lead to civic action, their potential to do so remains untested. Regardless, their achievements in pro-

moting serious discourse were noteworthy. We hope this experiment in high-quality civic discourse will be replicated, refined, and applied more broadly.

In the following chapter, we look at youth online initiatives for political organizing and action, and how the Internet has changed the face of activism.

Notes

¹ Quoted in Leslie Walker, "Web-Page Collection Preserves the Online Response to Horror," *Washington Post* 27 Sept. 2001: E1.

² Phil Noble, "Analysis of the Role of the Internet," Politics Online, 17 Sept. 2001, <http://www.cyberacties.nl/politicsonline.html> (13 June 2003).

³ "Where Are We Now?" WireTap, 25 Sept. 2001, <http://www.alternet.org/wiretapmag/story.html?StoryID=11585> (13 July 2003).

⁴ "Poetry," Youth Radio, 1 Oct. 2001, <http://www.youthradio.org/wtc/poetry.shtml> (13 July 2003).

⁵ "Caught in the Crossfire," YouthNOISE NOISEboard, <http://boards.youthnoise.com/4/OpenTopic?a=tpc&s=742299645&f=9394068931&m=2694068931> (11 July 2003). This topic received over 1,000 replies through the spring of 2003.

⁶ Pew Internet and American Life Project, "One Year Later: September 11 and the Internet," 5 Sept. 2002, <http://www.pewinternet.org/reports/toc.asp?Report=69> (13 July 2003). See also Pew Internet and American Life Project, "Commons of the Tragedy: How the Internet was used by millions after the terror attacks to grieve, console, share news, and debate the country's response," 10 Oct. 2001, <http://www.pewinternet.org/reports/toc.asp?Report=46> (15 Oct. 2003).

⁷ "10 Ways You Can Help," YouthNOISE, <http://www.dosomething.org/newspub/story.cfm?id=1003&sid=223&cid=33&hide=&hp=> (13 July 2003).

⁸ Fight for Your Rights, <http://www.mtv.com/onair/ffyr/discrimination/> (13 July 2003).

⁹ "What You Can Do To Fight Discrimination," Do Something, <http://www.dosomething.org/newspub/story.cfm?id=999&sid=230&cid=33> (13 July 2003).

¹⁰ Peace.protest.net, <http://pax.protest.net/Peace/hatemail.html> (13 July 2003).

¹¹ See Center for Media Education, *TeenSites.com: A Field Guide to the New Digital Landscape* (Washington, DC: CME, 2001), especially pp. 36-39.

¹² <http://www.globalkids.org/ea911/dialogue/group3/2.html>.

¹³ <http://www.globalkids.org/ea911/dialogue/group2/2.html>.

¹⁴ <http://www.globalkids.org/ea911/dialogue/group2/3.html>.

¹⁵ <http://www.globalkids.org/ea911>.

¹⁶ <http://www.globalkids.org/ea911>.

¹⁷ Benjamin Barber, *A Place for Us: How to Make Society Civil and Democracy Strong* (New York, Hill & Wang, 1998): 122.

¹⁸ Barry Joseph, personal interview, 3 Apr. 2002.

¹⁹ Barber, 121

²⁰ Joseph interview.

Chapter Five

Online Activism

On March 5, 2003, as the United States prepared to go to war with Iraq, thousands of high school and college students across the country staged a national walkout, marching across campuses, performing skits, reciting poetry, and staging mock elections. Under the slogan “Books Not Bombs,” the activists lambasted the Bush administration for its intent to plunge the country into war, and for not paying enough attention to a range of domestic issues, including health care, the environment, and education. The protest was coordinated by the National Youth and Student Peace Coalition, an organization formed by 15 student groups in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks.¹ In many ways, this event was reminiscent of the anti-war student protests of the 60s and 70s. But in the age of the Internet, organizers were able to draw on a powerful and versatile set of digital tools, enabling them to orchestrate a coordinated national event with more precision, and at considerably lower cost. Rather than bringing thousands of individuals to a single march on Washington, which other anti-war groups had done in the weeks before, this protest was able to generate hundreds of separate campus-based demonstrations in high schools and colleges across the U.S., all using identical downloaded flyers, posters, and press releases to convey the same message to the media. As with the WTO protests a few years earlier, the Internet played a central role in the campaign, equipping groups with new digital tools for planning strategy, coordinating activities, promoting press coverage, monitoring their impact, and sharing their successes.

This campaign is one of dozens of youth efforts that are using the Web for political organizing and activism. The groups involved represent a broad range of issues—from sweatshop reform to the environment to youth rights. Many are student organizations, with chapters on college and university campuses around the country. Some were created by established issue groups in order to recruit young people to their causes; others were launched by youth themselves to promote their own political agendas. A quick glance at a few of these online youth activist groups reveals a variety of issues, missions, and constituencies:

- 180 Democracy and Education (<http://www.corporations.org/democracy>), “dedicated to helping build a campus-based movement for political empowerment and participatory democracy.”
- Student Environmental Action Coalition (<http://www.seac.org/>), founded in 1998 as a “grassroots coalition of student and youth environmental groups, working together to protect our planet and our future.”
- Global Youth Connect (<http://www.globalyouthconnect.org>), whose mission is “to build and support a community of youth working to defend human rights and social justice and to inspire and empower a new generation of youth to act for meaningful social change.”

- RockForLife (<http://www.rockforlife.org>), a division of the Youth Outreach Program of the American Life League, committed to “offering the truth about abortion, infanticide, and euthanasia to America’s youth through music and ministry,” by providing youth “a voice, encouraging you to stand up among your peers and fight against the destruction of your generation.”
- The National Youth Advocacy Coalition (<http://nyacyouth.org>), “a social justice organization that advocates for and with young people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ) in an effort to end discrimination against these youth and to ensure their physical and emotional well being.”
- College Action Campaign (<http://www.collegeactivist.com>), the campus arm of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), created to “help you speak out for animals on your campus... organize demonstrations and events and educate fellow students, as well as provide resources, action ideas, and advice.”
- Americans for a Society Free of Age Restrictions (<http://www.asfar.org>), which fights the minimum voting age, curfew regulations, and other laws that limit the freedom of young people.

In the following pages, we offer profiles of some of these online activist groups, identifying the ways in which they are using the Internet to promote their causes. While they differ in their missions and approaches, they all employ similar strategies and tactics, some with more sophistication than others. Although they share many features of earlier, pre-Internet activism, these campaigns are also strongly rooted in the conceptual framework and technical capacity of the Web. While

most online activist groups use the Web as a tool to organize and coordinate offline grassroots efforts, there is evidence of a new genre of Web-based activism whose activities are confined largely to cyberspace. All of these efforts can be seen against a backdrop of recent trends, including a rise in campus-based activism focused on social change; the growing use of the World Wide Web by nonprofit organizations; and the emergence of companies, groups, and software promoting digital technologies for political purposes.

For anyone setting out to study the phenomenon, online youth activism is the quintessential moving target. As Paul Aaron explains in a report for OneWorld.net, part of the challenge involves the fluctuations in youth activism in general: “Groups spring up, die off, return under different names and merge.” This instability, he explains, stems from several factors, including “turnover among key leaders, lack of resources, onset of adult roles and responsibilities and a philosophical commitment to democratic experimentalism as opposed to institutional longevity.”² The nature of the Web itself has created an environment of rapid innovation, experimentation, and diffusion that further defies systematic examination. But it is possible to take a series of snapshots in order to identify directions, illuminate trends, and highlight strategies and tactics.

Student Activism

Although voting and other traditional forms of civic engagement by young people are on the decline, the last several years have witnessed a rise in political activism on many U.S. college campuses. “Today’s college and high school students participate more often in some form of activism than have previous groups, and often continue to effect change in their communities after graduation,” reported Tricia Cowen in a March 2001 issue of *The Christian Science Monitor*.³ “The level

of campus activism far exceeds the days of the late 1960s, against which many students are measured,” she observed. Citing a survey by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at the University of California, the article noted that “between 1966 and 2000, the portion of college freshmen who had participated in organized demonstrations during their senior year of high school tripled to 45.4 percent.”⁴ One of the factors that may have contributed to this rise in activism, according to the UCLA study, is an increase in community service at the high school level, with more than 80 percent of entering college freshmen having done volunteer work in their previous year as high school seniors.⁵

Anti-corporate campaigns, including the sweatshop movement, have been at the forefront of the most visible campus activism in recent years, according to journalist Liza Featherstone. As she explains, this “dramatic escalation, in both numbers and militancy” was catalyzed by

the exuberant global anti-corporate—or, outside the U.S., anti-capitalist—movement, made visible by carnivalesque protests from London in 1999 to Porto Alegre, Quebec City and Genoa in 2001. In the U.S., that movement, which includes activists concerned about labor and the environment, Third World debt relief and numerous other issues, was immeasurably energized by and found expression in the historic November 1999 anti-World Trade Organization (WTO) mobilization, now referred to simply as “Seattle.”⁶

But while liberal and progressive groups may account for a substantial portion of this student activism, conservative groups have also been on the rise. For example, Objectivist Clubs, based on the philosophy of Ayn Rand, conduct campaigns to counter the anti-globalization movement, organizing lectures, discussion groups, and occasional demonstrations to promote free trade and capitalism.⁷

Cyberactivism

This new generation of youth activism relies heavily on the array of digital technologies that have proliferated in the last decade along with the growth of the Internet. While it would be overly simplistic to suggest that the Internet caused this recent rise in student activism, it is clear that online communications have played an important role in facilitating activism, both domestically and globally. Howard Rheingold, whose 1993 book, *Virtual Communities*, helped spawn a generation of online social networks, has recently coined the term “smart mobs” to describe the ways in which activists use a variety of digital communications technologies, including personal digital assistants, cell phones, portable computers, and radio scanners, to wage on-the-ground activist campaigns.⁸ As journalist George Packer writes, “Electronic democracy allows citizens to find one another directly, without phone trees or meetings of chapter organizations, and it amplifies their voices in the electronic storms of ‘smart mobs’ (masses summoned electronically) that it seems able to generate in a few hours. With cell phones and instant messaging, the time frame of a protest might soon be the nanosecond.”⁹

The Web has spawned its own unique new forms of activism that rely on the key features of digital communications as linchpins of many organizational and political strategies. MoveOn.org (<http://www.moveon.org/>) is one of the organizations that owes its very existence to the Web. It has been hailed for its successful online campaigns, which have demonstrated the potential of the Internet for fundraising and organizing on a scale of unprecedented proportions. Created by two Silicon Valley software developers, who used the profits from their company to fund the venture, the website burst into the public arena during the 1998 scandal over President Clinton and Monica Lewinsky and the ensuing impeachment proceedings.¹⁰ According to the group’s website,

MoveOn.org used “electronic word of mouth” to launch a Web-based “flash campaign” “delivering over 2 million emails to Congress,” generating more than 250,000 phone calls, and mobilizing “thousands of volunteers to meet with representatives in 219 Congressional districts in 44 states.”¹¹

Since the original “censure and move on” campaign, the group has taken up other issues, including gun control, the environment and energy, nuclear disarmament, and the presidential elections, fostering the creation of other advocacy groups to promote the issues online. The organization has a two-fold strategy for choosing issues. As it did in the “Censure and Move On” campaign, the group focuses on areas where there is a “disconnect” between public opinion and government action. As MoveOn’s executive director told the *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, the organization is also careful to select “populist issues, ones that have real, broad resonance, and are easily understood.” As he explained, “There are a lot of great causes out there,” but “MoveOn typically won’t engage on an issue until it’s close to a tipping point where engaging a large number of our members can really make the decisive difference.”¹²

In late February 2003, MoveOn used its website to orchestrate a “virtual march on Washington,” in which on the same day hundreds of thousands of people sent email, fax, and telephone messages to the Senate and the White House, opposing the impending war on Iraq. Protesters registered online to join the protest, which was billed as a “way to influence policy without leaving your living room.” The protest jammed the switchboard on Capitol Hill and forced Senate offices to hire additional staff for the day to handle the volume of phone calls.¹³

In many ways, MoveOn typifies this new generation of “armchair activism,” requiring little more for democratic participation than the simple mouse clicks and minimal data entry involved in

a routine e-commerce transaction. MoveOn has also shown remarkable success at raising money online, an achievement that has caught the attention of many nonprofit organizations seeking to develop models for sustainability in the digital age. For example, the group was able to tap into its email list of 1.3 million U.S. “online activists” (boasting an additional 750,000 overseas), to raise money for Oxfam’s international relief efforts. The email appeal generated 6,900 responses, with donations totaling \$500,000—nearly two-thirds of all the dollars that Oxfam had received for Iraq.¹⁴

Martha McCaughey and Michael D. Ayers use the term “cyberactivism,” in their 2003 anthology of the same name; to describe a variety of organizations and activities using the Web to promote political causes. They see cyberactivism taking on many varied forms:

... [S]mall and large networks of wired activists have been creating online petitions, developing public awareness websites connected to traditional political organizations (e.g., Amnesty International online), building spoof sites that make political points (such as worldbunk.org), creating online sites that support and propel real-life (RL) protest (e.g., a16.org, which stands for April 16, the date of the World Trade Organization (WTO) protest in Washington, DC), designing websites to offer citizens information about toxic waste, and creating organizations (e.g., Indymedia.org) that have expanded to do traditional RL activities.¹⁵

The book provides case studies of numerous online campaigns, documenting how the unique capabilities of the Web have expanded the political toolbox of many activist organizations, extending the reach and effectiveness of traditional strategies and tactics, and introducing a host of new cutting-edge weapons rooted in the very nature of the Internet. The authors argue that “activists have not only incorporated the Internet into their repertoire, but also ... have changed substantially what counts as activism, what counts as community, collective identity, democratic

space, and political strategy. And online activists challenge us to think about how cyberspace is meant to be used.”¹⁶

Digital communications are shaping the way much of today’s issue campaigns are conducted, altering the character, style, and effectiveness of activism in the digital era. Indeed, the very structure of the Web, which lends itself to the kinds of informational, analytical, and organizational strategies on which activism depends, has become a fundamental component of many social action projects. “The Internet has been of fundamental importance in equipping activist groups to diffuse and de-centralize decision-making authority within and across organizations, conduct high-quality research and disseminate findings in a wide arc, sound alerts, and coordinate events,” Paul Aaron explains. “Low cost communication networks have made it possible for diverse groups ... to recruit and mobilize global alliances.”¹⁷ Thus the Web enables fast-moving activism without much of an infrastructure or administrative overhead. In the process, observes Aaron, “The Web takes on a metaphorical truth. Local campaigns are intricately and tightly linked to one another, much as ‘hotlinks’ connect their websites on the Internet. The result is ‘coordinated decentralization.’”¹⁸

E-Politics

As the Internet has become an indispensable tool for candidates, issue groups, and corporations, “e-advocacy” has assumed a prominent place among the arsenal of political weapons used to mount campaigns.¹⁹ A growing infrastructure of organizations, websites, consultants, and software tools have sprung up to provide technical, fundraising, and strategic support to online activism. E-advocates (<http://e-advocates.com>), a Virginia-based consulting firm, promises to help “organizations harness the power of the Internet to achieve legislative and political objectives, offer-

ing clients a full range of advocacy consulting services. Our campaigns generate online grassroots action and off-line legislative wins. E-advocates delivers a powerful combination of strategy, issue advocacy and cutting-edge technology to empower, activate, educate, and mobilize constituencies to influence policymakers and the media to achieve public affairs objectives.”²⁰

E.thePeople (<http://www.e-thepeople.org>), similarly, bills itself as a nonprofit, non-partisan organization with a mission to improve civic participation through the Internet. It allows users to write, sign, and send petitions and letters to local, state, and federal officials, and hosts “conversations” (discussion forums) on a number of timely issues. Combining offline events with online strategies, meanwhile, the Ruckus Society (<http://www.ruckus.org>) focuses on environmental and human rights issues (and more recently the anti-war movement) to engage young people in political activism. Founded in 1995, the Oakland-based organization convenes Action Camps (“a weeklong intensive training program designed to unite activists, students, organizers, and other people interested in learning more about campaign development and expanding their skills base”) that include sessions on Internet and digital activism. Recently Ruckus delved even more deeply into online activism with its “Tech Toolbox” action camp, designed to give activists the skills to mobilize and use technology and the Internet in the process of organizing and staging protests. Through its several programs, Ruckus helps “people learn the skills they need to practice direct action safely and effectively.”²¹ Unlike eActivist.org and e.thePeople, the Ruckus Society recognizes that while political engagement may begin online, through informational websites and email calls to action, much of youth activism ultimately ends in the streets, in the form of organized protest.

eActivist.org (<http://www.eactivist.org>) promises to be “an action resource where you can make a world of difference in a minimal amount of time.” The site appears designed to serve the forms of citizenship that are particularly suited to the digital age. “In today’s fast and time constrained world where we are inundated daily with information overload,” the site asks, “how can we find the time to be good citizens? Grassroots activists?” Promising “eActivism in three clicks or less,” the site “works to encourage electronic activism and civic participation by providing a collection of simple, easy-to-use progressive electronic actions and tools for the eActivist.”²² Despite such rhetoric, which owes more to Madison Avenue than to the March in Birmingham, the eActivist site itself is a useful compendium of links to contemporary issues and the organizations concerned with them, from racism and corporate accountability to non-violence/peace and women’s/children’s rights. Thus although it offers a convenient, “I-clicked-at-the-office” excuse for those wishing to avoid further involvement, eActivist’s extensive Links Directory (covering some 38 categories of activism, from animal rights and anti-racism to women’s rights and youth organizing) at least holds out the possibility that its users will extend their involvement in one cause or another beyond a few computer keystrokes.

Key Features of Online Activism

Sandor Vegh, one of the contributing authors of *Cyberactivism*, suggests some useful classifications for understanding the nature and scope of online activism. He uses the term “Internet-enhanced” to describe those activist efforts that use the Internet to supplement and enhance traditional advocacy tactics.²³ These might include education, press relations, direct action, lobbying, and organizing. “Internet-based” tactics, on the other hand, refer to a range of techniques and activities that are only possible online. For example, one

form of “hactivism” involves defacement or other changes to a corporate, governmental, or organizational website. Referring to this tactic as “cybergraffiti, a temporary disfiguration on the cyberfacade of a company or organization,” Vegh explains that “this act of cyberprotest seeks public attention and visibility by delivering a political message through the dissent.” The “virtual sit-in” is another form of Internet-based activism. This tactic, “as its name suggests (with all its historic connotations) aims to block access to a service, in this case, usually a website. It is achieved by directing an overwhelming amount of coordinated data stream at the target server, which then radically slows down or crashes under the traffic.”²⁴

A range of Internet-enhanced and Internet-based strategies and tactics can be found on the youth online activist sites we identified in our study:

Organizing and recruiting

While much of the organizing and recruiting done by activist groups still takes place in real-world, face-to-face settings, the Web can play an important role in streamlining and assisting in those processes. As one of our interviewees noted, the interactive nature of the Web gives it a unique “presence” that makes it “responsive,” thus differentiating it from a leaflet or other, more passive, informational and organizational tool. This dynamic nature of the Web makes it much easier for individuals to take immediate action, joining an organization or campaign online, emailing policymakers, or engaging in some other activity that enables them to become instant members. Many activist websites provide not only an opportunity to join instantly, but also offer timely information via email newsletters and action alerts that prompt further engagement, thus making visitors feel part of something larger and more dynamic than a print brochure alone might convey. Hyperlinks, created originally as convenient tools for research by linking documents online, have become essential features for online activist

groups, supporting coalition building, membership drives, and political organizing. The Web can link people to other organizations and individuals who are part of the same movement. Following the links on an activist website can enable one to swiftly traverse the political landscape of the Web, identifying the key organizations involved in a particular issue, joining dozens of online-facilitated political efforts, and engaging in conversation with other like-minded individuals.

Publication and distribution of materials

The rich graphic interface of the World Wide Web, combined with the connectivity of the Internet, have created the perfect, cost-efficient publication and distribution mechanism for nonprofits, supplanting the Xerox machine and “snail mail” of the recent past. Activist websites offer a wide assortment of downloadable brochures, pamphlets, and training guides, available at the click of a mouse. Downloadable posters, for example, can be taken “hot-off-the-cyberpresses” out into a variety of real-world settings, creating instantaneous, ubiquitous and unified messages and symbols.

Alternative news source

A website, bulletin board, or listserv can also serve as a cheap and efficient alternative news source, capable of providing information and news coverage that circumvents traditional news outlets. The Indymedia sites (<http://www.indymedia.org/>), for example, which were set up during the 1999 protests in Seattle against the World Trade Organization, quickly mushroomed into a network of “sixty autonomously operated and linked websites in North America and Europe, with a smaller number in Africa, Latin America, and Asia,” according to Dorothy Kidd, another contributor to *Cyberactivism*.²⁵ The Independent Media Center was designed to make an “end-run around the information gatekeepers,” she explains, which “brought together activists and journalists from across the different media with movements that were able to circulate their messages in a scope

and scale not realized before.”²⁶ A number of websites have been set up to serve as clearing-houses for a variety of causes and political efforts. For example, Protest.Net (<http://protest.net/>), which lists scores of “Major Protests and Convergences” and “International Days of Action” both by date and by issue, also offers news, commentary, and action alerts, along with user-submitted articles and notices.

Orchestration and coordination of demonstrations, lobbying, and direct action

The Web has become an indispensable tool for orchestrating political actions—online or offline demonstrations, lobbying, or direct actions. As Sandor Vegh explains,

Protestors’ conscious and efficient use of the Internet is exemplified by the centralized website and email distribution list that is set up for each major protest to bring together the scores of participating activist organizations, coordinate their actions, and provide practical information ranging from accommodations and places to eat cheaply to methods of nonviolent resistance against police brutality.²⁷

The website for the National Youth and Student Peace Coalition (<http://www.nyspc.net/home.html>), for example, offers campus activists an entire tool kit for organizing student strikes, including “How to organize a Student Strike on your campus”; “Talking Points for Media Spokespeople”; Strike Organizing Packet, an 18-page downloadable booklet that includes talking points and media framing guidelines, along with detailed instructions on “leafleting, posterizing, and getting the word out,” fundraising, publicity, mock elections, fliers and handouts. In this manner, the Web serves as a means of facilitating off-line activism at the grassroots level. The central organization often plays a catalytic and coordinating role rather than a strong leadership role. According to Paul Aaron, this is a key feature of youth activism, which “... remains radically decentralized. National campaigns are organized

from the bottom up and depend upon a system of lateral communication and decision making, often electronically mediated.”²⁸ A number of national websites feature links to grassroots organizations, enabling interested individuals to join local efforts. For example, the website for the Student Environmental Action Coalition (<http://www.seac.org>) features a map of all the states, with clickable links to grassroots organizations in each state.

Press relations

Increasingly, the Web has become a sophisticated tool for generating press coverage, both online and off. The websites we examined provided much evidence of a Web-based press strategy, the most common practices of which involve use of online training in press and public relations, and the distribution of materials related to media strategy. Such materials include training manuals that come as PDF files that can be printed out and distributed, prewritten press releases for use at the grassroots level, and downloadable press kits. MoveOn.org, for example, maintains a virtual press room for use by journalists and researchers. Increasingly, such efforts include streaming media examples of audio and video PSAs and other promotional and informational material. The National Youth and Student Peace Coalition's Books not Bombs campaign (<http://www.nyspc.net/home.html>) designated a section of its website for monitoring and documenting the press coverage of its campus-based efforts at the local level. This feature not only enabled the organization to document the impact of its media campaign, but also allowed participants around the country to celebrate successes, demonstrating how the collective efforts of activists across the country are paying off.

Viral marketing

Almost all of the online activist sites that we surveyed use some form of viral marketing. A common feature of traditional e-commerce, viral mar-

keting quietly promotes products or services by embedding product information, such as a clickable URL, trademark, or product logo, with every communication sent from one user to another. As one observer noted in an enthusiastic *Fortune* magazine account of such promotional techniques, “marketing messages spread like the flu, passed by word of mouth from one friend to another to five more, until there’s a full-blown epidemic and products are flying off the shelves.”²⁹ Activists have appropriated this marketing tool for their own political purposes, using it to spread the word, recruit new members, and mobilize action. The MoveOn email campaigns demonstrate one of the most effective uses of this tactic.

Fundraising

MoveOn is one of the biggest success stories here, but many other online activist groups—as well as non-activist groups—are increasingly using online fundraising methods. While e-commerce may have hit some snags since the dot.com boom and crash, nonprofits are becoming increasingly skilled at using the Web to raise money. A growing number of sites now sport “Donate Now” buttons, which in the case of the United Students Against Sweatshops website (<http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~fragola/usas/index.html>) links to a form on the Groundspring.org website (http://www.groundspring.org/index_gs.cfm), where one can use a credit card to donate money and sign up to receive e-activism Action Alerts. Groundspring (formerly e-grants.org) describes itself as “a nonprofit organization that provides simple, affordable, and integrated services for small to medium-sized nonprofit organizations to help them become effective users of Internet technology in their fundraising and management of donors and supporters.”³⁰ The organization says it “serves 900 nonprofit organizations and has processed \$4.5 million in online donations, partnering with Working Assets Funding Service

through its GiveForChange.com site.” A number of other sites also include links to Working Assets, the long distance phone company that has made a reputation fundraising for liberal and progressive groups.

A Tale of Two Sites

In the following pages, we profile two online youth activist efforts. Both demonstrate how the Web has become a core component of youth activism, illustrating some of the strategies and tactics that youth organizations are utilizing through digital technology. Though neither represents the state-of-the-art sophistication of MoveOn.org, they reflect two important trends in young peoples’ use of the Web for political activism. United Students Against Sweatshops (<http://www.studentsagainstsweatshops.org/>) is considered one of the central groups that emerged as part of the rise in student activism during the 1990s. While its successes may not be entirely attributable to the Web, its efforts are in many ways emblematic of the new e-activism of our era. Very much an on-the-ground form of activism, USAS nevertheless demonstrates the ways in which digital communications have been incorporated into the strategies and tactics of youth activism.

Peacefire (<http://www.peacefire.org/>) represents a significantly different form of activism, one that emerged out of the politics of Internet policy during the mid-1990s. In contrast to USAS’s grassroots, membership structure, Peacefire remains largely a Web-based activist venture, founded and run by a single individual. Nonetheless, it has played an important catalytic role in promoting the interests of youth in the larger public debate over the policies governing the Internet. As David Bennett and Pam Fielding note in their book, *The Net Effect: How CyberAdvocacy is Changing the Political Landscape*, “The

evolution of the Internet as a political tool began with Net citizens’ promotion of issues directly related to the use and regulation of the technology. Internet censorship and unsolicited email were two of the earliest and most prominent political issues advanced online.”³¹

United Students Against Sweatshops

Students at college campuses across the country have been staging a new kind of fashion show. Described as “political theater” and “educational comedy,” these events are designed not to showcase the latest styles, but to shock and, in turn, to educate and mobilize young people to take direct action against the companies that produce the clothing. As young models strut down the runways sporting pants by The Gap or the latest Nike running shoes, the audience is treated to a running commentary describing in graphic detail the exploitative and dangerous working conditions at the off-shore plants that produce the clothing. Sometimes the fashion displays are interspersed with skits, speeches, slide shows, or videos. “We chose to do a fashion show to highlight the differences between those who wear the stylish brand-name clothes and those who make them,” one of the activists explained in a press release.

Fashion is equated with glamour and good taste, and not in any manner with exploitation and abuse. By juxtaposing this reality, we hope that the next time consumers go to the mall to look for the latest in fashion from the most famous designers, they will think of the conditions under which those clothes were produced and of the people who produce them.³²

This blend of show business, political commentary, and public shaming has become a stock-in-trade tactic of United Students Against Sweatshops, a student group dedicated to fighting the corporations that use sweatshop labor to produce clothing. The “mock fashion shows” are produced by student activist groups that are part of

the anti-sweatshop movement that began coalescing in the late 90s. They have played out on college and high school campuses across the country, often to packed audiences. Scripts for the fashion shows can be downloaded from the Internet by members of USAS, providing detailed instructions for staging, publicity, and clothing styles (retrieved from students' personal closets).

In a consumer culture, where youth are continually targeted by marketers and identity formation has become intertwined with brand awareness, USAS has seized upon a perfect issue for today's Generation Y. The campaign against sweatshops reaches students and other young people where they live, attempting to politicize the very clothes they wear and the brands they buy. The movement aims to mobilize youth to take action against not only the clothing manufacturers, but also their own high schools, colleges and universities that contract with these companies for uniforms and other licensed apparel. In the words of Paul Aaron, "A culture saturated with corporate efforts to endow products with totemic value has begun to breed its own anti-bodies. As the most lucrative and relentlessly targeted 'demographic,' young people have honed the capacity to deconstruct the marketing of meaning."³³

USAS grew out of efforts in the 1990s by several labor organizations, including the National Labor Committee (NLC) and the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE) to protest the growing number of overseas operations by U.S. clothing companies employing cheap labor and subjecting workers to oppressive working conditions. As Liza Featherstone explains in her book chronicling the organization's history, "One of the campaigns that would prove most influential to the student movement was the anti-Nike campaign begun by Jeff Ballinger, former head of the AFL-CIO's Jakarta office, who founded Press

for Change in 1998." Campaigning against Nike's dollar-a-day wages, the movement drew widespread media attention, and "groups like Global Exchange, the NLC, and the People of Faith Network began anti-Nike campaigns of their own. Nike's 'branding' as a sweatshop employer had a profound influence on students, since so many schools have contracts with the sneaker giant."³⁴

In the summer of 1997, UNITE invited a group of young people to be interns as part of its "Union Summer" project. Sent to visit the manufacturing plants of major clothing companies, many of these youth witnessed first-hand the conditions in some of the overseas "sweatshops." The following year, student activists who had been working on the sweatshop issue gathered for a conference in New York, where they launched United Students Against Sweatshops, described as an "informal but cohesive international coalition."³⁵ Its goals were to "1) provide coordination and communication between the many campus campaigns and 2) coordinate student participation and action around national intercollegiate debate and around Codes of Conduct and monitoring systems."³⁶ Within a short time, the group had grown to include more than 150 college affiliates and 12-15 high school groups.³⁷

With national offices housed in a modest suite within UNITE's Washington, D.C., headquarters—across the street from the AFL-CIO and about a block from the White House—the USAS is described by staff members as a very "young organization," one that is still developing some of its strategic thinking and organizational structures and processes.³⁸ Like many of the youth activist groups, USAS is highly decentralized, with the national organization playing more of a coordinating than a directing role. Such decentralization is further facilitated by the Internet. According to Paul Aaron,

Groups like USAS exercise an extremely light touch, their role limited to logistics and coordination rather than strategic command and control. Small groups of key national organizers, both youth and adult, have played catalytic roles, but the campaign has taken root as an authentic grassroots movement.³⁹

The USAS national office raises between \$200,000 and \$300,000 per year from foundations and individual donors, including the Arca Foundation, General Services Foundation, Stern Family Fund, New World, and the Phoenix Fund for Workers and Community.⁴⁰

Though the Internet has become a critical tool for the group's efforts, it is in many ways an extension of earlier, standard communications and organizing tools. As USAS National Coordinator Ben McKean explained, "We're just communicating with youth in the way that youth themselves communicate with each other."⁴¹ Nonetheless, the Web has helped facilitate the work of the organization and its campus-based affiliates. The Internet also makes it possible to do things much more efficiently and with less cost than other methods. For example, "as an organization with a budget," explained Molly McGrath, a USAS staff member, "it is possible to spend \$20,000 a year on conference calls, but with emails and listservs, you can perform the same functions for free."⁴² There are also drawbacks to the presumed efficiency of Net-based communications, however, which can perform some functions very well, but which may not be that useful for others. While email works well for communication and announcements, McKean observed, it is not really a very good vehicle for discussion. And although listservs do provide some space for thoughtful comments, McKean expressed concern that most people don't read them.⁴³

One of the best things about the Web is that it provides an opportunity to see what other groups are doing, to monitor successes and to share in

the sense of a growing movement. As McGrath explained, although she had begun her own local activist efforts on the issue while a student at the University of Wisconsin, it wasn't until she went on the listserv and discovered "all these other people doing similar things" that she realized she was part of a larger movement. "It blew me away," she remembered. In addition to enabling individuals and local groups to see themselves as part of the larger movement, the Web also provides local groups with practical information about how campaigns are waged, what tactics are successful, and which ones don't work.⁴⁴

Despite its successes, USAS faces a number of challenges. One is staying abreast of the swift technological changes taking place in the digital media. The USAS website is undergoing upgrades to bring it up to speed with some of the more state-of-the-art websites such as MoveOn.org. The organization began using a new software program called "Get Active," popular with a number of advocacy groups, which will give the organization more capacity to send "blast faxes" to corporate CEOs or policy makers. When interviewed for this report, McGrath and McKean explained that USAS was about to undergo a redesign of its website, having hired a consulting group to perform the update and redesign for about \$8,000 (or roughly 25 percent less than the standard rate for such services). The new website design will enable the group to raise money online, which could mean substantial new resources coming into the organization.⁴⁵

USAS has also worked with a public relations firm called New Economy Communications, which has helped the organization design many of its media campaigns, including Web-based efforts. But its public profile has diminished somewhat in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks. Both McKean and McGrath acknowledged that it had been "difficult to do much of anything" in 2002, although they maintained that there was still a very

healthy involvement in the anti-sweatshop issue among college students, pointing to an organizing conference held in January 2003 at the University of Southern California that was attended by 350 people, the biggest gathering ever of anti-sweatshop activists.⁴⁶

Whether United Students Against Sweatshops will attain institutional stability and thrive as an ongoing political presence remains to be seen. But its successful efforts as an early pioneer in Web-enhanced grassroots activism could serve as a model for other youth activists seeking to enlist the Internet as a tool for promoting their causes.

Peacefire

When the U.S. Congress passed the Communications Decency Act in 1996, the new law unleashed a storm of protest from civil libertarians, librarians, and other groups. Arguing that the legislation was far too broad, in that it restricted adult access to information on the Internet in order to protect children, the ACLU, the American Library Association, and other organizations immediately challenged the CDA in court. The action provoked widespread public debate about the proper role of government in the new digital era.⁴⁷ The court challenge to the CDA and ensuing public debate sparked an explosion of new filtering software and blocking technologies, with names like CyberPatrol, SurfWatch, and NetNanny, creating an industry almost overnight. One of the core arguments in the court challenge was that these new tools would enable parents to protect their children from harmful Internet content, thus making a law restricting such content not only unconstitutional, but unnecessary.⁴⁸

At the time of the court challenge, Bennett Haselton was a 17-year-old college student at Vanderbilt University. The media coverage of the controversy caught his attention and troubled him. “No one,” he recalls, “was representing youth on

this issue. The court case was all about harm to adults, yet youth have First Amendment rights as well.”⁴⁹ A computer whiz and math major who had entered college at the age of 16, Haselton decided to create his own website in order to participate in the public debate over this issue. Using his knowledge of computer programming, Haselton set out to expose the inner workings of filtering software, engage in his own version of sabotage, and instruct young people on how to circumvent the new technological tools that were being developed to block their access to content on the Web.

Peacefire first gained widespread recognition that same year when it publicized the secret list of forbidden websites blocked by Cybersitter, one of the prominent companies producing and marketing filtering software. After learning of a Boston researcher’s success in decoding the list of blocked sites, Haselton leaked the information to Brock Meeks and Declan McCullagh, two reporters for the online publication, *Wired.com*. The story’s appearance on the Web generated more press coverage, prompting the company that manufactured Cybersitter to threaten a lawsuit against Haselton. Charging that Haselton had “engaged in illegal criminal copyright violations to further his juvenile teenaged political agenda, and reduce the effectiveness of our product,” the company also tried to pressure Peacefire’s Internet service provider to shut down the website.⁵⁰ According to Haselton, the company never came through on its threat, but it did add Peacefire to its list of blocked sites.⁵¹

Like a number of other websites in this study, Peacefire features its own narrative about its origins, its mission, and its accomplishments.⁵² Though it characterizes itself as an organization with more than 7,000 “members” (i.e., mailing list subscribers) and twelve “staff,” it is really a one-person operation. Haselton does say that he works with a number of volunteer colleagues who

help him with strategy and other tasks associated with the operation of the website, but basically he was responsible for creating it in the first place and now for keeping it running. While he does rely on expert help from lawyers from time to time, he doesn't work on a formal basis with any specific organization and is not engaged in coalition building. With a master's degree in mathematics, Haselton makes his living as a freelance programmer, self-funding the website project.⁵³

In contrast to groups such as USAS, which use the Internet as a tool to facilitate more traditional types of real-world activism, Peacefire's efforts are conducted almost exclusively online. Both its policy focus and its advocacy strategies are largely confined to the Internet. Essentially a savvy, Web-based strategic media operation, it relies primarily on the press to get its message out nationally, and in particular on relationships that Haselton has established with reporters and editors of such online publications as *Wired.com*, *Salon.com*, and *ZDNet*. As he explains, if he were to try to interest *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, or one of the television networks in his reports, he would be faced with a more daunting task, competing for attention amid a plethora of established organizations with sophisticated and well-funded public relations operations. But by working more closely with the online press, who have what he calls "a lower threshold on what they'll do a story on," who regularly cover Internet-related issues, and who lack some of the traditional media's space constraints, he has a more readily available venue. These publications can also function as sources for the mainstream press, breaking stories online that are later picked up by the mainstream newspapers and broadcast networks.⁵⁴

"Project Bait and Switch" illustrates one of Peacefire's more creative uses of the Web to create news.⁵⁵ As described in Peacefire's materials, "Bait and Switch was an experiment ... to find out whether small, personal home pages and

websites of large organizations get identical treatment from blocking software companies in deciding what to block." Haselton and his colleagues went to the websites of conservative groups such as Focus on the Family and Concerned Women of America and found text that appeared to be in violation of the official policies of several filtering software companies. This included anti-gay passages that seemed to fit the description of "hate speech." By cutting and pasting the text, they were able to create fictitious websites on GeoCities, Tripod, Angelfire, and the Globe. Then they notified the filtering companies of the existence of these sites, without indicating who had created them or who was doing the complaining. According to Haselton, the filtering software companies were caught off-guard, forced to defend to the press what appeared to be contradictory policies. Some found themselves in the uncomfortable position of having to issue instant directives to block the websites of the very organizations involved in promoting filtering software.⁵⁶

This kind of stunt is in keeping with the website's unorthodox and often humorous style. Although generating news coverage is at the heart of the group's strategy, the website also pokes fun at journalists. On its "Press Information" page, for example, along with the standard list of experts, quotes, and other resources for reporters, the site features a tongue-in-cheek link for those "interested in writing a sensationalist article about Internet censorship issues." Clicking here takes one to a fictitious order page for buying "sensationalist quotes," based on a variety of possible stories. Suggested leads are provided, along with the quotes, which can be "purchased" for anywhere from \$50 to \$125. "Father discovers that his daughter has figured out how to use encryption to stop him from reading her email; demands that the authors of the encryption program tell him how to break the encryption, even though this is mathematically impossible," reads one pos-

sible “lead,” followed by a quote that can be purchased for \$75: “The laws of mathematics don’t change just because parents want them to change.”⁵⁷ Or, as Haselton declares elsewhere on his site, “It’s not a crime to be smarter than your parents.”

In the last few years the site has expanded its scope beyond its original narrow focus. Though still concerned mainly with content-filtering and -blocking software (which it mercilessly subjects to reliability tests), it also looks more broadly at a number of Internet-related issues, including the Digital Millennium Copyright Act, the Children’s Internet Protection Act, and anti-spam projects. Under the provocative tagline, “You’ll understand when you’re younger,” Peacefire vows to support “open access for the Net Generation.” Among its efforts on behalf of open access is its “circumventor” program, which provides detailed instructions and software that promises to “turn your home computer into a website that people can access to get around their blocking software.”⁵⁸ Using a combination of open-source software, the circumventor establishes a home-based website that permits others to access blocked sites, promising to defeat “all Internet censorship programs, from Net Nanny to the national firewalls used by the government of China.”⁵⁹

Peacefire has also extended its age range. It was first created to serve “the interests of people under 18 in the debate over free speech on the Internet,” part of an emerging youth rights movement that has been sparked in part by the growth of digital communications.⁶⁰ “Peacefire used to be more of a ‘teens only’ group,” explains the site, “but we realized that there was no point in excluding what any potential members had to offer, simply based on their age.”⁶¹ Now the website describes itself as “a ‘people for young people’s freedom of speech’ organization, not a ‘young people for freedom of speech organiza-

tion.’ In other words, you can join at any age if you are against censorship for students and people under 18 in general.”⁶² This change may also reflect the fact that Haselton himself, now in his mid-twenties, has entered the ranks of adulthood.

The whole enterprise of online activism, however, is still in its infancy. In the next few years, more sophisticated software programs, and newer, wireless technologies, will introduce additional tools for activists, influencing the strategies and tactics of future advocacy efforts. Young people will be at the forefront of these changes. “... [K]ids are having perhaps the most important and far-reaching impact in the area of collaborative computing,” observes *Newsweek*’s Rana Foroohar, “which basically involves groups of people (small or large) coming together online—often in real time—to work, play games, socialize or even just hang out and watch a virtual sunset.”⁶³ If the recent past is any guide, virtual protests and other forms of online activism will surely be added to that list, as young innovators put the new technologies of commerce and communications to decidedly political use. We will take a glimpse into what the future may hold in Chapter 7.

Notes

¹ Tamar Lewin, “Student Groups Plan Walkout to Protest War,” *The New York Times* 1 Mar. 2003.

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³ Tricia Cowen, “Student Activists: Still a Strong Force,” *Christian Science Monitor* 27 Mar. 2001, <http://csmweb2.emcweb.com/durable/2001/03/27/fp17s1-csm.shtml> (19 Oct. 2003).

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⁵ Cowen.

⁶ Liza Featherstone and United Students Against Sweatshops, eds., *Students Against Sweatshops* (New York: Verso, 2002): 28-29.

⁷ Cowen.

⁸ Howard Rheingold, *Smart Mobs: The Next Social Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus): 160.

⁹ George Packer, "Smart-Mobbing the War," *The New York Times Magazine*, 9 Mar. 2003: 46-49.

¹⁰ Don Hazen, "Moving On: A New Kind of Peace Activism," *AlterNet*.org, 11 Feb. 2003, <http://www.alternet.org/print.html?StoryID=15163> (14 Feb. 2003).

¹¹ <http://www.moveon.org/documentation.html> (13 Mar. 2003).

¹² Grant Williams, "Advocacy Group's Online Savvy Nets More Than Donations," *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, 17 Apr. 2003: 26.

¹³ John Tierney, "Anti-War Demonstration That Does not Take to the Streets," *New York Times* online, 26 Feb. 2003, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/02/26/national/26CND-MARCH.html?th> (1 Mar. 2003); Juliet Eilperin, "'Virtual March' Floods Senate With Calls Against an Iraq War," *The Washington Post* 27 Feb. 2003: A22.

¹⁴ Williams, 23.

¹⁵ Martha McCaughey and Michael D. Ayers, *Cyberactivism: Online Activism in Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2003): 1.

¹⁶ McCaughey and Ayers, pp. 1-2.

¹⁷ Paul Aaron, "Youth Activism and Global Engagement," Part VI.

¹⁸ Paul Aaron, "Youth Activism and Global Engagement," Part VI.

¹⁹ See, for example, Emilienne Ireland and Phil Tajitsu Nash, *Winning Campaigns Online: Strategies for Candidates and Causes*, 2nd ed. (Bethesda, MD: Science Writers Press, 2001).

²⁰ E-advocates, "About Us," <http://www.e-advocates.com/aboutus.html> (19 Oct. 2003).

²¹ "Our Mission," Ruckus Society, <http://www.ruckus.org/about/mission.html> (15 Dec. 2003).

²² "About eActivist.org," eActivist.org, http://www.eactivist.org/eactivist/about_eactivist.html (15 Dec. 2003).

²³ Sandor Vegh, "Classifying Forms of Online Activism: The Case of Cyberprotests against the World Bank," in McCaughey and Ayers, 71.

²⁴ Vegh, 85.

²⁵ Dorothy Kidd, "Indymedia.org: A New Communications Commons," in McCaughey and Ayers, 62.

²⁶ Kidd, 62.

²⁷ Vegh, 74.

²⁸ Paul Aaron, "Youth Activism and Global Engagement," Part VI.

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³¹ Daniel Bennett and Pam Fielding, *The Net Effect: How Cyber-Advocacy is Changing the Political Landscape* (Merryfield, VA: E-advocates Press, 1999): 2-3.

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³⁵ United Students Against Sweatshops, *Sweat-Free Campus Campaign: Organizers Manual* (n.d.): 2.

³⁶ USAS, *Sweat-Free Campus Campaign*, 2.

³⁷ Molly McGrath and Ben McKean, personal interview, 24 Feb. 2003.

³⁸ McGrath and McKean interview.

³⁹ Paul Aaron, "Youth Activism and Global Engagement," Part VII, <http://www.benton.org/OneWorldUS/Aron/aron7.html> (19 Oct. 2003).

⁴⁰ McGrath and McKean interview.

⁴¹ McGrath and McKean interview.

⁴² McGrath and McKean interview.

⁴³ McGrath and McKean interview.

⁴⁴ McGrath and McKean interview.

⁴⁵ McGrath and McKean interview.

⁴⁶ McGrath and McKean interview.

⁴⁷ The Electronic Frontier Foundation maintains an archive of files related to the checkered history of the Communications Decency Act at http://www.eff.org/Censorship/Internet_censorship_bills/ (13 July 2003).

⁴⁸ Daniel J. Weitzner, "Yelling 'Filter' on the Crowded Net: The Implications of User Control Technologies," in Monroe E. Price, ed., *The V-Chip Debate: Content Filtering From Television to the Internet* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1998): 207. As Weitzner explains, many of the same groups that embraced new filtering technologies in their challenges to CDA were later to become critics of such devices.

⁴⁹ Bennett Haselton, personal interview, 25 Feb. 2003.

⁵⁰ Quoted in Rebecca Vesely, "Cybersitter Goes After Teen," *Wired.com*, 9 Dec. 1996, <http://www.wired.com/news/politics/0,1283,901,00.html> (11 July 2003).

⁵¹ Haselton interview.

⁵² <http://www.peacefire.org/info/about-peacefire.shtml> (viewed December 7, 2003)

⁵³ Haselton interview.

⁵⁴ Haselton interview.

⁵⁵ Peacefire.org, "Project Bait and Switch," <http://www.peacefire.org/BaitAndSwitch/> (13 July 2003).

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⁵⁷ Peacefire.org, "Resources for journalists writing sensationalist articles," <http://www.peacefire.org/info/press.html> - sensational (13 July 2003).

⁵⁸ <http://www.peacefire.org/> (13 July 2003).

⁵⁹ Peacefire's circumventor uses a combination of OpenSA (the Open Server Architecture project that encrypts communications traffic and forms the backbone of the circumventor), CGIProxy (a CGI script which fetches blocked Web pages), Windows NT/2000/XP Utilities (freeware created by Luis Carlos Castro Skertchly), and Perl (a scripting language). Bennett Haselton, "Instructions for Setting Up a Simple Circumventor," Peacefire.org, <http://www.peacefire.org/circumventor/simple-circumventor-instructions.html> (13 July 2003).

⁶⁰ Don Tapscott, *Growing Up Digital* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1998): 89.

⁶¹ Peacefire.org, "About Peacefire.org," <http://www.peacefire.org/info/about-peacefire.shtml> (13 July 2003).

⁶² Peacefire.org, "About Peacefire.org."

⁶³ Rana Foroohar, "Listening to the Kids," *Newsweek International*, 25 Aug. 2003.

Chapter 6

Youth Engagement: Civic Theory and Electronic Practice

This study brings to light a vibrant body of youth civic websites and presents a detailed and nuanced description of them. It also pinpoints trends that have significant implications for how civic websites can be used: the types of objectives they propose, their use of interactive technology, and their funding and sustainability. Still, even after completing that groundbreaking analysis, we find ourselves pondering essential, unanswered questions. What impact can this rather sizable body of material have on youth civic behavior? Can digital enterprises help reverse the trend of declining civic engagement? What elements should be present in order for Web content to change young people's attitudes and perceptions, knowledge bases, skills and behavior? Finally, what lessons will young people draw from their online experience about the meaning of active and responsible citizenship?

Evaluating the impact of civic websites goes beyond the scope of the research that we undertook. However, a body of data exists that does shed light on these questions. We find it in the scholarly literature on young people's development, as adolescents and as civic actors.

The literature of youth civic development

In order to engage each new generation in active citizenship, a society must instill in its young people the appropriate interests and feelings, skills and dispositions. What those are and how to foster them has been extensively addressed in the literature of youth development and civic devel-

opment. To date, only a small portion of that literature has addressed the effects of the Internet, although in recent years that inquiry has begun. We cite in Chapter 1 the findings of social scientists such as Delli Carpini, Schuler and Galston, and will build on their work and others' as we continue the discussion at the end of this chapter. However, Internet studies are too young, and online civic engagement too specific a topic, to have generated a substantial body of theoretical literature. To be able to draw on a larger body of research, and to examine more general concepts and criteria for civic development, we turned to the traditional literature on youth development. There we sought elements that translate well to the new realm of "virtual" civic development.

The literature on youth civic engagement delineates three areas where young people need to acquire mastery in order to become active, effective citizens: relevant knowledge ("civic literacy"), capacity for action ("civic skills"), and emotional connection and motivation ("civic attachment"). Constance Flanagan and co-author Nakesha Faison describe these as the means by which youth programs enable young people to "identify with the common good and become engaged members of their communities."¹

Civic Literacy

Civic literacy is defined by Flanagan and Faison as "knowledge about community affairs, political issues and the processes whereby citizens effect

change, and about how one could become informed.”² Much of that knowledge was, in years past, presented in high school government and civics classes. Many of today’s adolescents have virtually no classroom instruction in these topics. For them, levels of civic and political knowledge are positively associated with parental levels of education, as well as with any civic content they do learn in school, its range and recency, classroom discussions of current events, and participation in student government and community service.³

Our study of online civic content suggests that, appropriately utilized, the Web could potentially be added to the list. Its broadest contribution to youth civic engagement lies at present in its role as a source of information. The preponderance of websites we examined contain substantive information about community or national affairs. Some actually provide textbook-style lessons on civic affairs, the workings of government, and roles for the involved and responsible citizen. Most provide this information in the context of an actionable goal. For example, the Global Response website (<http://www.globalresponse.org>) sponsors letter-writing campaigns to promote environmental protection and the rights of indigenous peoples. The website (see chapter 2 for a fuller description) provides background information about the endangered ecosystem and its importance to local populations, and identifies a governmental or corporate decision-maker with power to protect the target area. The website then urges young people to write or call that policy-maker, providing both contact information (a phone number, address or email link) and a sample letter or statement. Thus, the website identifies a problem, analyzes its roots, and indicates how young people can take action with others on behalf of a proposed solution. It is a powerful example of the Web’s pedagogic potential in the civic arena.

Sadly, many websites do not exploit the Internet’s capacity to promote civic literacy through interactivity. Online information is often presented as static text that could just as well be found in a book or printed newsletter. Yet even in those cases, the Web’s contribution to civic literacy is noteworthy. Most obviously, its electronic nature makes vast amounts of civic information accessible. No longer is a young person limited to the offerings of the local school or library. Nor are civic materials available only at certain hours or locations. Rather, with access to electricity, an adequately equipped computer, and an Internet connection (basics that are increasingly available, thanks to the e-rate that wires schools and libraries, as well as the expansion of home access), young people have access to a huge universe of information from sources around the world.

Beyond that, the Internet’s informational offerings can contribute to behaviors and attitudes. Civic literacy correlates positively (in adults, at least) with attitudes or values that are necessary for a democratic society to function, such as tolerance.⁴ It is also associated positively (again, among adults) with the actual behavior of engagement in community or political affairs.⁵ For these reasons, even simple and static presentations of information on the civic Web can contribute to civic engagement in meaningful ways.

Civic Skills

Flanagan and Faison define civic skills as “competencies in achieving group goals.”⁶ This apparently simple definition masks the complexity of the tasks being proposed to young people, which for Flanagan and Faison include communications skills such as active listening and public speaking, intellectual skills such as perspective-taking, and leadership and organizational skills such as contacting public officials and organizing meetings. Other scholars broaden the list, citing “critical and

reflective strategies for processing information; formulation and expression of opinions; understanding and tolerance for diverse points of view; listening and taking turns; principled reasoning; and bargaining and compromise in group decisions” and collective action, civic imagination, public problem solving, and coalition building.⁷

Some civic skills are modeled with relative frequency on civic websites. As Chapter 2 amply illustrates, many pro-voting and issue-advocacy websites encourage young people to contact policy makers, and provide such tools as model letters and online links that permit users to email their views to government officials instantly. One such website is the Indiana University Center for Participation and Citizenship’s YouthVoice.net (<http://www.indiana.edu/~ythvoice/socialtools.html>), which offers “how-to” information on contacting legislators, petition writing, news release writing, and testifying.

Ideally, message boards provide a forum for deliberative civic discourse where young people learn how to propose and discuss differing views and, where necessary, negotiate a mutually acceptable agreement. As Chapter 4 relates, message boards do offer hands-on practice of such relevant skills as formulating and expressing opinions, debating opposing views, and taking turns. However, they do not always elicit thoughtful expression, sound and principled reasoning, or sustained dialogue. Given that our study did not encompass interviews with message board users, we could not determine to what extent message board users reflect on the views expressed by others, and whether they are open to changing their own viewpoints in response to what they learn. We did encounter indications of the acquisition of skills from the experimental small-group “youth circles,” also discussed in Chapter 4.

A few websites excel at teaching civic-related skills, including such complex skills as understanding society’s values and hidden messages. One outstanding example is Tolerance.org, which offers an online tool called “Writing for Change: Raising awareness of difference, power, and discrimination” (<http://www.tolerance.org/teach/expand/wfc/index.html>), a series of exercises designed to help the reader recognize the value statements implicit in seemingly innocent choices of words. Elsewhere, the site’s “Images in Action” section (http://www.tolerance.org/images_action/index.jsp) invites the site visitor to decode the unspoken messages in paintings, statues, and other symbols depicting American history and culture. And it offers a series of psychological tests (http://www.tolerance.org/hidden_bias/02.html) that allow the visitor to “test yourself for hidden bias.” Based on rapidly shifting images—a particularly apt use of the Internet’s capabilities as an electronic medium—these tests help the user discover less-than-conscious associations and value judgments about Native Americans, Arab Muslims and other minorities. In each case, the website explains what the tests are for and, through commentary or open-ended questions, leads the user through a process of reflection and self-discovery.

Other civic skills may not lend themselves to online instruction. Some are by definition practiced in a group, and as such are not readily transferable to websites built for individual participation. Moreover, the learning of certain skills may require the presence of a skilled and sensitive trainer. As we noted in Chapter 2, the Bay Area organization “Diversity Works” offers training programs that prepare youth to educate their peers on improving race, ethnic, gender, religious, and socioeconomic relations. Although its website (<http://www.diversityworks.org/>) provides a link to a training manual, it accompanies the manual with a precaution:

We encourage educators to contextualize any of the activities in this manual and to use them at times and with groups who are ready to take this ‘next step.’ We also encourage you to take plenty of time for this work and to order activities from lower risk to higher risk so that learning may take place in a safe and conducive environment.⁸

The training is clearly envisioned as being conducted face-to-face with the hands-on assistance of a skilled facilitator. These examples suggest limitations in the capacity of the Internet to teach some civic skills, although websites may direct young people to offline programs where the skills may be acquired in person.

In general, we found the Web to be an under-used venue for teaching civic skills. In fact, very few websites set out deliberately to teach civic skills. While skills are modeled on some websites, rarely do website producers highlight them or explicitly draw attention to them as valuable tools. These shortcomings strike us less as an inherent weakness of the Web and more as a lost opportunity. Most civic sites are focused on their immediate goals—civic, to be sure—and seem not to have given much thought to using their websites as training grounds for young people. Future efforts to promote civic engagement might want to address nonprofit organizations directly, drawing their attention to the ways they could utilize the Internet to inform, motivate, and train young people as emerging active citizens.

Civic Attachment

Civic attachment, the third building block of youth civic engagement, refers to an affective or emotional connection. It is, according to Flanagan and Faison, the feeling of having a voice and a stake in public affairs, which then leads one to want to contribute to the community. Delli Carpini articulates civic attachment as the sense of being recognized and valued as a meaningful part of the civic whole:

the satisfaction that comes from participating with others for a common purpose; the identification of a public problem that affects you or those you care about; and the belief that your involvement will make a difference.⁹

Efforts to build civic attachment are found on youth websites in a variety of forms: explicitly, using direct appeals to shared values; symbolically, invoking group identity or belonging with images, icons, and special “in-group” language; or substantively, with concrete opportunities for young people to make their voices heard and to make a difference.

One form of appeal is the invocation of national identity or patriotism. The flag is a common symbol on government sites and the sites of political parties. This symbol of national identity can also be made a more explicit statement of the obligations facing a citizen. The youth site YESfresno.org (<http://www.yesfresno.org/>), which provides “Youth Empowerment and Service” to young people of this California town, displays a waving flag on its homepage and the motto *E Pluribus Unum* underneath. The site visitor who clicks on the motto is linked to a page that explains the three national mottos that appear on every US coin: *E Pluribus Unum*, Liberty, and In God We Trust. The page not only explains the mottos—a contribution to civic literacy—but cites them as “civic ideals,” suggesting that within the American ethos there is a responsibility of citizens to work with others: “From many into one” or “United we stand.”

Also importantly for the sense of belonging, the Internet allows young people to speak out on the important issues of the day. Message boards and websites dedicated to online youth journalism are just two examples of the new types of public soapbox available to young people online. (Message boards are discussed in Chapter 4; online youth journalism is the topic of one of the sections of Chapter 2.) Thus the Internet makes

the youthful user a contributor and creator of civic conversation, not just a consumer. Furthermore, publication on the Internet proffers access to a huge audience. These factors—original voice and amplification of voice—help provide the “voice and stake in public affairs” and the sense that “one matters,” which help build the young person’s feeling of civic attachment.

Interaction of Elements

Creating an interplay of civic literacy, skills, and affect is highly significant. McLeod found that families that expose their children to controversial issues and encourage them to express their ideas within the family correlate with adolescents who are “the most likely to be interested in public affairs media content and to have higher levels of civic knowledge.”¹⁰ In other words, exposure to controversial ideas—a specific type of civic knowledge—joined with the practice of self-expression—a civic skill—led to both greater interest in civic affairs (civic affect) and to greater civic literacy. This led McLeod to suggest that in place of an exclusive focus on content, civic engagement research would be well advised to look more closely at “process or form.”¹¹

McLeod’s findings are seconded in a 2003 study by the Carnegie Corporation of New York and CIRCLE (the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement) which recommended “six promising approaches to civic education.” Among them: that schools teach about government, history and democracy in ways that “avoid teaching only rote facts about dry procedures,” and that schools encourage students to discuss current events in the classroom, including controversial issues.¹² These recommendations highlight the importance of opportunities for young people to speak out on issues that they consider important to their lives (youth voice), and the importance of airing a variety of view-

points, including controversial ones. These two functions are, as it happens, particular strengths of the civic Internet.

Having the information, the skills and the desire to participate in civic life are essential starting points, but they do not fully tip the balance toward the likelihood of civic involvement. Other elements that play a role include opportunity and initiative.

Opportunity

As we consider the potential of civic websites to increase civic engagement, several opportunity thresholds need to be taken into account. First, of course, is the opportunity to get online. Schools and libraries provide this access to most American youth today, although with some constraints, such as time, selection of websites, and privacy. Once connectivity is ensured, some websites offer completely online opportunities for engagement, reliant on nothing more than an adequately equipped computer and an adequately prepared user.¹³ Other websites serve essentially as announcements of civic opportunities that exist offline. Our study indicates that these “brochureware” sites are relatively common. While they may serve as important markers to young people—signaling the types of civic engagement available, their geographic location, hours of operation, programs, intended participants, etc.—they do not expand “opportunity” beyond existing real-world limitations.

Additional factors in a young person’s life impede their ability to respond to civic opportunity. Delli Carpini mentions time and money.¹⁴ We would add the problem of mobility for young people who do not have cars, drivers’ licenses, or adequate public transportation. Online participation can help young people overcome all these obstacles. The Internet’s always-on, geography-free nature is a major advantage in bringing civic knowledge, discourse, and programs to young people.

Initiative

In moving young people from knowledge, opportunity, and intention to actual involvement, initiative is also required. Reed Larson offers an illuminating discussion of youth initiative as based on three elements: intrinsic motivation, concentration, and engagement over time.¹⁵ He notes that youth typically exhibit low intrinsic motivation in their classroom work, but accord it high levels of concentration. Conversely, many unstructured after-school activities, such as “hanging out” with friends, elicit high intrinsic motivation but low levels of concentration. Organized after-school activities such as sports and hobbies rank high for both. Sports and hobbies also lend themselves to continued engagement over an arc of time—another requirement, according to Larson, for initiative or action. This trio of attributes raises tantalizing questions about the potential of civic websites to strengthen youth initiative. Unfortunately, these questions lay beyond the scope of this study, requiring as they do direct observation of website users. Still, it is tempting to speculate.

Consider for example the appeal to young people of online video games. Many young people play the games voluntarily, indicating intrinsic motivation. Gamers are renowned for their concentration, and many play for hours at a time, months on end. If the ease of concentration and the sustained use evinced by many online game-players were to translate to interactive civic websites, then we might speculate that interactive civic websites designed as gaming experiences, when voluntarily used, would contribute to all three elements of youth initiative: motivation, concentration, and engagement over time. This speculation, if it proved true, could provide useful leads to “best practices” on civic websites. Future research focused on user interaction with civic websites may find this a fruitful line of study.

Interestingly, some civic websites appeal to “extrinsic motivation,” for example the use of prizes to reward young people for participation. We observed this phenomenon in the youth involvement website YouthNOISE (<http://www.youthnoise.com/>), as described in chapters 2 and 3. While Larson’s framework seems to argue *a priori* against the value of extrinsic motivation, Flanagan’s emphasis on civic literacy may provide a counter-argument: If prizes or celebrity endorsement are sufficient to lure young people into learning more about a civic topic, and if civic literacy itself then inclines people towards participation, then perhaps this approach is worthy of greater consideration. Again, further study, including user observation and testing, seems to be indicated.

Conceptions of Citizenship

Civic literacy, skills and attachment, opportunities, and initiative are all important in understanding how civic engagement develops in youth. However, they beg a fundamental question: What kind of civic engagement is being developed? In other words, what concept of citizenship do civic websites inculcate? What scope of social responsibility do they urge young people to embrace, and what are the implications for democracy? These questions are rarely discussed on websites. Yet the conception of citizenship that underlies website content may have a profound impact. Implicitly or explicitly, the model that is presented molds the vision in a young “emerging citizen” of what his or her role in society ought to be.

One study that addresses this issue squarely is “What Kind of Citizen? The Politics of Educating for Democracy,” by Joel Westheimer and Joseph Kahne, which analyzes programs teaching “good citizenship” to high school students.¹⁶ In considering the visions of citizenship presented by websites, found Westheimer and Kahne’s framework helpful and applicable.

The study delineates three levels or visions of citizenship. The first, which Westheimer and Kahne designate the “Personally Responsible Citizen,” is described by example: “The Personally Responsible Citizen works and pays taxes, obeys laws, and helps those in need during times of crisis ... contributes to a food or clothing drive ... volunteers ... in a soup kitchen...”¹⁷ Engagement, in this paradigm, consists of assisting others through charitable behavior, on the one hand, and complying with established norms, on the other. In this vision, civic behavior is generally responsive as opposed to proactive and does not seek to mobilize others. Programs (and websites) that present such a model to young people emphasize such traits as personal responsibility, self-discipline, and compassion.

Such websites occur plentifully in our study. America’s Promise (<http://www.americaspromise.org/>), for example, describes itself as an effort “to mobilize people from every sector of American life to build character and competence of our nation’s youth by fulfilling five promises: (1) caring adults, (2) safe places, (3) healthy start, (4) marketable skills, (5) opportunities to serve.” The emphasis on character building, and the choice of service (volunteering) as the embodiment of civic engagement, place it squarely in the Responsible Citizen category.

The Personally Responsible Citizen who engages in service may gain hands-on experience addressing societal needs, for example by serving people who are the victims of crisis or extreme need. Those experiences can be tremendously influential in young persons’ lives, contributing substantially to their awareness of social problems and their understanding of how they are met—civic literacy—and to their sense of being participants in the public sphere—civic attachment. In the words of Flanagan and Sherrod, “In an Eriksonian sense, community service can be an opportunity for adolescents to envision the kinds

of people they want to become and the kind of society they want to create.”¹⁸ Research also suggests that youthful experiences can contribute to a life-long practice of volunteering.¹⁹ For all these reasons, community service has been adopted by many high schools, whether as simple service or in the form of service learning, which combines volunteering with classroom study and reflection. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, roughly ten percent of U.S. public high schools require community service for graduation, as do nearly 40 percent of private high schools.²⁰

Invaluable as it is, “Personally Responsible” citizenship is not designed to change the circumstances of people or communities that are served, much less address the root causes of the problem. It may alleviate the situation today, but may not seek to ensure that a similar situation—perhaps affecting different individuals—does not arise tomorrow. Other visions of citizenship attempt to orient young people toward a more proactive and change-oriented approach. This is Westheimer and Kahne’s second level, which they call the “Participatory” citizen.

“Participatory” citizens seek to engage and mobilize others in responding to community needs. It calls for a more sweeping definition of responsibility than does the “personally responsible” model, a broader scope of action, and a wider range of skills. Youth can find this kind of challenge on the Web in projects to organize a community or in-school project. SHiNE (<http://www.shine.com/>), which stands for “Seeking Harmony in Neighborhoods Everyday,” invites young people to do just that:

Are There Problems In Your Community You’d Like to Fix? The Shine Network can help! ... [It’s] a cool program to help you come up with creative and fun ways to address issues that are important to you! Come join an innovative nationwide network of young people taking the lead to improve their communities and schools.... We

like to think of the SHINE Network as a really good recipe. We give you directions, but it's up to you to find the ingredients and mix 'em well.²¹

The website then goes on to provide tools and guidance for launching a project, setting goals, recruiting others and taking action.

The Web offers an array of efficient, electronic mechanisms for reaching and mobilizing others. Emails and instant messaging, the bread and butter of young people's online communication, are first on the list. In addition, civic websites offer an array of other options. On many advocacy websites, pre-written emails to legislators can be forwarded to a friend simply by typing in that person's email address. News articles and opinion pieces, distributed by a listserv or posted on a website, may also offer email forwarding. Links on websites and "viral marketing" messages on personal emails also serve to spread messages across electronic networks. These techniques may result in one more signature on an electronic letter or petition; may alert others to an issue or an action opportunity they were unaware of; or may entice the recipient to visit a civic website, thus contributing to their further education and, possibly, deepening their involvement.

Conceptualizing and organizing a project, persuading others to join, setting goals, and taking action are complex activities that draw on a large set of civic skills. They may call for processing information critically, formulating and expressing opinions, planning, organizing and leading meetings, and engaging in group decision-making. While websites may place young people in a position where they need these skills, most sites provide little training to support them. The capacity of the Web to impart either the practical or the intellectual skills needed for such active citizenship needs to be explored.

Westheimer and Kahne call their third level of citizenship the "Social Change Agent." The feature that differentiates this category of citizenship from the preceding ones is a critical analysis of societal problems. The Social Change Agent calls for structural changes in the societal status quo on such issues as access to power, resources, money, inclusion, or status. Websites that fall into the Social Change category may encourage young people to examine and challenge societal patterns of discrimination, or to bring previously marginalized populations into positions of greater power, status, or acceptance. Recent years have seen youth organizations tackle these complex problems, and their efforts are to be found online. One such example is United Students Against Sweatshops, which engages young people in the U.S. on behalf of the wage, health and organizing rights of textile workers in foreign sweatshops. USAS's work and their use of the Internet are examined in detail in Chapter 5.

Another type of online social change activism is the work of gay and lesbian youth websites. They provide information, resources, advocacy and support to youth trying to push the boundaries of both legal rights and societal inclusion. Their work is visible in such sites as Out Proud (<http://www.outproud.org/>), the website of the National Coalition of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Youth; Young Gay America (<http://www.younggayamerica.com/>), and the Gay-Straight Alliance Network (<http://www.gsanetwork.org/>). Sites that advocate for tolerance and diversity are discussed in Chapter 2, section 8.

For the purpose of analyzing youth civic websites, we add one level to those proposed by Westheimer and Kahne. We call it "pre-engagement." It refers to the stage of engagement-building that seeks to get young people interested in the civic realm, or

to teach the workings of civic affairs, without attempting to stimulate direct involvement. Establishing this fourth category enables us to include websites that encourage youth to learn about, think about, and discuss civic issues. Government-sponsored civic websites for youth generally fall into this category. One example is the Federal Bureau of Investigation's website for youth in grades six through twelve (<http://www.fbi.gov/kids/6th12th/6th12th.htm>), which provides information on being an agent in the FBI. On the site, young people can follow a case through the FBI labs, beginning with information gathering for the case and culminating in its resolution. Setting aside any intended recruitment purposes, the website is essentially designed to present information on the workings of this government agency. Message boards, where the purpose is the sharing of perspectives, ideas or opinions—but not necessarily an incitement to action—are another example of “pre-engagement” activity.

We found these categories—Pre-engagement, Personally Responsible Citizen, Participatory, and Social Change Agent—useful in providing a framework for analyzing the conception of citizenship inherent in a website. One element that makes them unwieldy is that they are based not on objectively identifiable types of civic activity (voluntarism, voter registration, etc.) but on the larger *intent* behind that activity. Such determinations are hard to make; when not indicated explicitly on a website (for example, in a statement of mission), they are subject to interpretation and dispute. This is not surprising; as Westheimer and Kahne acknowledge, their analysis refers to questions of underlying ideology. In their words,

the narrow and often ideologically conservative conception of citizenship embedded in many current efforts at teaching for democracy reflects neither arbitrary choices nor limits in our knowledge about teaching and learning per se, but rather political choices with political consequences.²²

After all, the traditional “good citizen” image inherent in the “Personally Responsible Citizen” occurs in the context of, and reflects, broader trends in contemporary U.S. society that are essentially conservative: an emphasis on individualism, the termination or privatization of many governmental functions that were previously seen as “civic” concerns, and an acceptance of the status quo. The “participatory” and “social change” visions of citizenship, on the other hand, reflect a different political perspective: an emphasis on collective action, a belief in the social responsibility of government, and a readiness to propose changes in the status quo.

Quite apart from ideology, the more active visions of citizenship—and the youth websites that embody them—also emphasize something that is refreshing and full of hope: faith in young people to act creatively, proactively, and effectively in the civic realm.

What role for the Internet?

The possibility that the Internet can contribute directly to youth civic engagement has not, of course, gone unnoticed by scholars, and some studies exist that address the question directly. Flanagan and Gallay, in an early assessment, discuss the Internet's democratic potential in general terms, citing such elements as the broad access to information that the Internet affords, its contribution to civic attachment for youth, the exposure it offers to new perspectives and its nature as a “free space” where “alternatives to the status quo [can be] explored” and “young people can explore identities, test out and debate ideas and find common ground... [across] the boundaries of their geographical or social backgrounds.” They conclude that “the Internet provides a free space where the younger generation can explore what a ‘global citizen’ might be.”²³

More recently, scholarly research has examined directly the attitudes and practices of Internet users. In 2003, the Pew Internet & American Life Project asked Internet users how they utilized their online connections during the Iraq war. They found that more than three-quarters used the Internet to “get information about the war... share differing opinions... send and receive emails... express their views and offer prayers.” In addition, about 20 percent of Internet users went online to “make their views about the war known to others.”²⁴ Their findings echo our own observations about youth Internet use in the wake of the September 11 attacks.

Another study looked at the power of the Internet to arouse interest in politics. Utilizing an intriguing and original study design, Lupia and Philpot tested college-age youth to determine what types of website increased their political interest.²⁵ Their study addressed two hypotheses: “News and information web sites do not affect young adults’ political interest and activity,” and “All such sites have created indistinguishable effects on younger and older adults.” It found that, in fact, websites did stimulate young people’s “political interest,” and that some sites were more effective than others at doing so. When users found that a site provided new information quickly, easily, and accurately, they were “significantly more likely to report increased interest and likelihood of participating in politics.”²⁶ In the 2000 election, approximately 80 percent of Americans aged 18-24 were online. Lupia and Philpot’s study suggests that, given this high degree of youth “connectivity,” civic websites hold the potential to act as a significant springboard for youth political participation.

A recent report on civic education is valuable in suggesting new roles for the civic Internet, although the report itself does not focus on the Web. The Carnegie Corporation of New York and CIRCLE in 2003 convened a group of civic

engagement experts to identify the components of effective civic education programs.²⁷ Their findings, referred to earlier in this chapter, articulate desirable goals, criteria, and techniques for civic education in formal settings such as schools. Interestingly, the similarity between their recommendations and the features found on many websites suggests that civic websites could make a distinct contribution to classroom civic instruction.

The goal of civic education, according to the Carnegie-CIRCLE study, is to prepare young people to be “competent and responsible citizens,” which the study defines in terms of four criteria:

- being “informed and thoughtful,” with “a grasp and an appreciation of history and the fundamental processes of American democracy... [and] of public and community issues”;
- participation in their communities, pursuing “an array of cultural, social, political, and religious interests and beliefs”;
- taking action politically to accomplish public purposes; and
- holding “moral and civic virtues,” such as concern for the rights and welfare of others, social responsibility, tolerance and respect, and belief in the capacity to make a difference.²⁸

The match between schools’ needs and websites’ offerings is very close. Most of the websites we examined make a distinct contribution to civic literacy, although often in terms of topical issues rather than American history and government. They certainly provide ample opportunity for participation; while our study excluded purely cultural and religious activities, it documents extensive opportunities in the social and political realms. And many youth civic websites embrace explicitly the goal of establishing civic virtues or values. Where websites appear to be weak is in the instruction in civic skills, as we discuss above. For the teaching of civic skills, a teacher or professor

would have to go well beyond website content. That seems, however, eminently appropriate. At the same time, it underscores the importance of situating the pedagogic use of websites in the context of a school or other institution.

At the programmatic level, the study notes that while effective approaches to civic education may have diverse forms, all share certain characteristics. These include a “deliberate, intentional focus” on encouraging active student civic and political engagement, as well as “active learning opportunities that offer students the chance to engage in discussions... and... activities that can help put a ‘real life’ perspective on what is learned in class.”²⁹ The report further notes that

Research shows that schools can help to develop competent and responsible citizens when they... [o]ffer extracurricular activities that provide opportunities for young people to get involved in their schools or communities... [and] [e]ncourage students’ participation in simulations of democratic processes and procedures.³⁰

The message here seems to be that engagement with real-life issues, especially experiential learning, is key to bringing civic instruction alive. Civic websites would seem to be a logical tool for that purpose. They offer a mechanism for “bridging” between the classroom and the outside world, bringing external realities directly into the classroom and, in many cases, opening the possibility of pursuing them face-to-face.

This clear convergence of goals, criteria and approaches suggests that civic websites could readily be incorporated into formal programs for civic education. This would require, of course, that standards and criteria be developed for website selection to address such concerns as appropriateness of content, reliability of information, and promotion of multiple views. The result could be the infusion of vivid, compelling and action-oriented information for youth.

Notes

¹ Constance A. Flanagan and Nakesha Faison, “Youth Civic Development: Implications of Research for Social Policy and Programs,” *Social Policy Report* 15.1 (2001): 3-16, <http://www.srpd.org/sprv15n1.pdf>.

² Flanagan and Faison, 3.

³ Flanagan and Faison, 3.

⁴ Michael X. Delli Carpini and Scott Keeter, *What Americans Know About Politics and Why it Matters* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

⁵ Flanagan and Faison, 3. Also, Delli Carpini and Keeter.

⁶ Flanagan and Faison, 3.

⁷ Jack M. McLeod, “Media and Civic Socialization of Youth,” *Journal of Adolescent Health* 27.2 (2000): 47; Richard Battistoni, *Civic Engagement Across the Curriculum: A Resource Book for Service-Learning Faculty in All Disciplines* (Providence, RI: Campus Compact, 2002): 17.

⁸ <http://diversityworks.org/crm.html>.

⁹ Michael X. Delli Carpini, “Gen.com: Youth, Civic Engagement, and the New Information Environment,” working paper, 2000, <http://depts.washington.edu/ccce/events/carpini.htm>.

¹⁰ McLeod, 47.

¹¹ McLeod, 47.

¹² Carnegie Corporation of New York and CIRCLE, *The Civic Mission of Schools*, (New York: Carnegie Corporation, 2003), <http://www.civicmissionofschools.org/> (4 Dec. 2003): 6, <http://www.civicmissionofschools.org/>.

¹³ Perhaps the expression “nothing more than” should be placed in quotes. Access to electricity, a high-speed computer with mouse and modem, and an Internet hook-up, as well as reading literacy, computer literacy, and the physical capacity to view and use a computer, are not commanded by everyone in the United States, much less in the world.

¹⁴ Delli Carpini.

¹⁵ Reed W. Larson, “Toward a Psychology of Positive Youth Development,” *American Psychologist* 55.1 (2000): 170-183.

¹⁶ Joel Westheimer and Joseph Kahne, “What Kind of Citizen? The Politics of Educating for Democracy,” unpublished manuscript.

¹⁷ Westheimer and Kahne, 3.

¹⁸ Constance A. Flanagan and Lonnie R. Sherrod, “Youth Political Development: An Introduction,” *Journal of Social Issues* 54.3 (1998): 453.

¹⁹ For example, a study by Independent Sector and Youth Service America found that volunteer service during youth had a strong impact on the volunteering habits of adults: Adults who engaged in volunteering in their youth volunteered more time than adults who began their philanthropy later in life. Independent Sector and Youth Service America, *Engaging Youth in Lifelong Service: Findings and Recommendations for Encouraging a Tradition of Voluntary Action Among America's Youth*. (Washington, DC: Independent Sector, 2002). Similarly, a Gallup Poll commissioned by Independent Sector found that youth service made adult volunteering three times more likely. Independent Sector, *Giving and Volunteering in the United States* (Washington, DC: Independent Sector, 1996).

²⁰ Research Librarian, National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, personal communication, 31 July 2003.

²¹ "Are There Problems In Your Community You'd Like to Fix?" Shine.com, http://www.shine.com/shine_network.cfm (15 Oct. 2003).

²² Westheimer and Kahne, 1.

²³ Constance Flanagan and Leslie Galloway, "Nurturing Democratic Character in Teens: The Potential of IT," paper prepared for Teens and Technology Roundtable, Penn State University (5 Oct. 2001): 1–6, <http://www.pop.psu.edu/socresp/benton3.pdf>. (29 Jan. 2004).

²⁴ Lee Rainie, Susannah Fox, Deborah Fallows, "The Internet and the Iraq War: How Online Americans Have Used the Internet to Learn War News, Understand Events, and Promote Their Views," Pew Internet & American Life Project, Washington, DC (2003): 2, 6.

²⁵ Arthur Lupia and Tasha S. Philpot, "More Than Kids Stuff: Can News and Information Web Sites Mobilize Young Adults?" Paper prepared for delivery at the 2002 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Boston, Aug. 29–Sept. 1, 2002, <http://apsa.cup.org/Site/abstracts/005/005001LupiaArthu.htm>.

²⁶ Lupia and Philpot, 6.

²⁷ Carnegie Corporation of New York and CIRCLE.

²⁸ Carnegie Corporation of New York and CIRCLE, 10.

²⁹ Carnegie Corporation of New York and CIRCLE, 21.

³⁰ Carnegie Corporation of New York and CIRCLE, 6.

Chapter 7

Technological, Economic, and Regulatory Trends

In the ten-odd years since the Mosaic browser made navigating the Internet a simple matter of point and click, the Internet, as the *New York Times*' Steve Lohr has pointed out, "has changed daily life in ways that most people could not have imagined in 1994. People manage their lives and relationships via email and instant messaging, and second-graders are skilled Google searchers."¹ Online communications continue to evolve, often in unpredictable ways. Many changes bubble up from below, reflecting new ways that users choose commercial products—"geek driven and grassroots spread," in the words of Scott Rosenberg.² Many of the "defining users" of Internet technologies are young people—the very segment whose civic engagement is the focus of this report.

Recent innovations that young people have embraced include instant messaging (IM), which is already a standard among adolescent Internet users (74 percent of whom use IM, compared to 44 percent of online adults, according to Pew Internet and American Life data). IM is now finding its way into the corporate world.³ "Walk down the halls in most any office these days and you're likely to hear the familiar sound of an instant message arriving on someone's computer," writes *Newsweek*'s Jennifer Tanaka.

"Ping!" The technology—"IM" to its devotees—is like a rapid-fire email that's instantly sent and received, popping up on top of everything on your screen, as if someone stuck a Post-It note there. About a third of today's 200 million IM users worldwide are doing it at work. As it turns out,

the tool that was so popular initially with teenagers is also great for doing business. Analysts predict that by 2006 IM will overtake email as the primary communication tool at work.⁴

"[T]he first generation to grow up with instant messaging is bringing it with them into the workplace," writes Amy Harmon in the *New York Times*.⁵ For many companies, adds CNET's Jim Hu, "... instant messaging has evolved from a teenage fad to a valuable communications tool that is central to everyday business. Companies are using IM not only to send real-time messages, but also to collaborate on projects, exchange data and create networks linking all types of Internet devices."⁶

SMS (for Short Messaging Services), meanwhile, a cell-phone-based variant of IM, is also finding its way into the workplace. Extremely popular in Scandinavia and Japan, SMS is growing in popularity in the US, too, especially among younger users for whom the technology's constraints (a 160-character-per-message limit) apparently poses less of a problem than for older users.⁷ Used most often for making social arrangements and for friendly, if telegraphic, chitchat, SMS has business applications as well, such as placing orders and checking stock prices. Its civic potential is visible in the "flash demonstrations" that have been organized in various countries around the world, where a pre-alerted group is notified at the last minute of gathering points for demonstrations—often to avoid police repression.⁸

Even while IM and SMS make the transition to corporate communications, consumer-grade versions of both technologies continue to evolve. Microsoft's new group IM program is based on the peer-to-peer (P2P) principle ("a communications model in which each party has the same capabilities and either party can initiate a communication session").⁹ Although best known as the scourge of the recording industry through such file-sharing services as Napster and Kazaa, P2P also has broader implications. According to John Hale, the director of the Center for Information Security at the University of Tulsa, P2P can contribute "... in creating peer groups that have something to say, which can share interests. In legal uses, peer-to-peer networking could be the next wave in computing, proving that it is more than a breeding ground for pirated music."¹⁰ When used by citizens or advocates rather than music consumers, the potential civic and cultural implications of P2P become significant. P2P networks can contribute to the kind of "Creative Commons" that Stanford law professor Larry Lessig and his colleagues have put together.¹¹ Hundreds or thousands of users, committed to the online equivalent of participatory democracy, can help distribute content that would have little chance of survival in a purely commercial distribution system.

Web logs, or "blogs," described by the *Washington Post's* Leslie Walker as "hybrids of diaries and newspapers," are one-person accounts of online life, news or gossip, mixing personal observations with links to other sites that the writer finds significant. Dan Gillmor, the *San Jose Mercury News's* technology columnist and chief blogger, suggests that "Weblogs brought to life an aspect of the Web that had been mostly submerged—the idea that this is a read *and* write medium, that we should be able to write on the Web as easily as we can read what's in our browsers."¹² This combination of citing others' online borrowing and commentary could, according to cybertheorist Steven Johnson, "extract some new kind of collective wisdom out

of a universe of armchair opinion leaders."¹³ If these are among the developments currently taking shape online, we can only imagine how far we will have progressed a decade from now, when ubiquitous, embedded systems will have become as commonplace as indoor plumbing and electric power. Broadband, or high-speed Internet, has fueled much of the recent growth in the online sector. The latest data on broadband penetration indicates that over a third of all Internet households currently have broadband access (i.e., 37 percent of the 59-percent share of wired homes, or 22 percent of all households).¹⁴ Even faster speeds, and alternative delivery platforms, are on the horizon.¹⁵ For a preview of what might be headed our way, South Korea offers a telling, if not altogether encouraging, glimpse of the future. With over half of the population online at speeds up to 40 Mbps (far faster than anything currently available to US residents), South Koreans are reportedly "shifting more of their analog lives to their computers, where they watch soap operas, attend virtual test preparation schools, sing karaoke and, most of all, play games."¹⁶

While most of the offerings currently envisioned for broadband are entertainment-oriented, it was the war in Iraq that spurred many online content providers to launch streaming-media offerings designed to take advantage of the burgeoning broadband market. "Inspired by a steady rise over the last 18 months in the number of people with high-speed Internet access, now at more than 70 million in the United States," observes David D. Kirkpatrick in the *New York Times*, "the websites of many of the major news organizations have hastily assembled a novel collage of live video, audio reports, photography collections, animated weaponry displays, interactive maps and other new digital reportage."¹⁷ Potential applications can be imagined for schools, libraries, arts groups, political candidates, and for many other civic purposes. For example, streaming media may expand the

Internet's capacity to provide training in civic skills, thus remedying a deficiency identified by this study.

If broadband's growing impact on the Internet seems predictable—it's part of the faster-cheaper-smaller triumvirate that has long governed technological developments—the other prime mover in the ongoing Internet revolution—Wi-Fi—seemingly came out of nowhere. Wi-Fi, or wireless fidelity, a *BusinessWeek* online special report informs us, is “an increasingly popular networking standard that's used to create wireless local area networks (LANs) in homes and offices at speeds ... far faster than the peak 144-kilobit-per-second rate so-called 3G (for third-generation) mobile-phone networks that Sprint PCS, for one, plans to deliver.”¹⁸ Wi-Fi brings a step closer to hand the promise of convergence: the wireless linking of a wide range of consumer electronic, computing, and household appliances. While implementations will vary from household to household and user to user, this convergence will involve some combination of devices (TV sets, computers, video game players, digital video recorders, cellphones, and PDAs) offering a range of services (television, interactive and high-definition television, video-on-demand, Web surfing, email, gaming, streaming media, voice, video/text messaging) via wired and wireless networks.

Wi-Fi has both civic and commercial implications. A vibrant “free Wi-Fi” movement has sprouted up with outposts in a number of cities, offering public-access hot spots in an effort to make the broadband Internet more widely available. “The beauty of Wi-Fi,” observes Anthony Townsend, who runs NYCwireless, a network of more than 140 free access points, “is that it is so decentralized.”²⁰ Yet Wi-Fi is also part of the larger field of wireless communications that remains very much in flux, and in which the stakes are well beyond the reach of well-meaning civic networks.

The power of these new technologies, enabling full two-way transmission of all manner of con-

tent, is beyond dispute. But it is the actual implementation of these technologies—defining *how* this power is used—that will largely shape the Internet of the future. Two basic models will vie for supremacy—the wide open Internet and the closed cable platform—and the winner of that battle may well have to be determined by government policy. Of the relevant regulatory issues likely to be decided over the next several years, three stand out in particular: copyright/intellectual property, open access/nondiscriminatory transport, and spectrum management.

Copyright/Intellectual Property

The copyright conundrum pits the largest media and entertainment companies in the world against the seemingly irrepressible forces of digital duplication and distribution. The implications of the digital copyright debate for purely *civic* culture are not immediately apparent. Its impact on our popular culture, to be sure, will be profound, especially as increasing amounts of entertainment and information are delivered on digital platforms. The potential for a handful of interlocking media giants to control all aspects of popular programming—from creation and production to distribution and subsequent ancillary rights—increases with every merger and acquisition, and especially as the old media giants extend their reach into the Internet.²¹ Backed by the provisions of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA), which prohibit efforts to tamper with encryption and other means of controlling access to protected content, along with subsequent digital rights management (DRM) technologies, the media giants are poised to exert tremendous control over the mainstream fare that invariably attracts the largest audiences. “The key to this shift,” explains a recent *Newsweek* report,

is the technology that protects information from unauthorized or illegal use.... Like it or not, rights

management is increasingly going to be a fact of your life. Not only will music, books and movies be steeped in it, but soon such mundane artifacts as documents, spreadsheet files and email will be joining the domain of restricted information.²²

As a consequence, the specter of an essentially privatized media culture, in which the bulk of readily available content will be digitally tagged and copy-protected, has become all too real.

In an odd, almost perverse way, however, the effects of the media and entertainment industries' efforts to control, commodify, and monetize popular culture online may actually *enhance* our understanding and appreciation of other aspects of the media environment, including such concepts as the public domain, fair use, civic space, and the "public interest, convenience, and necessity."²³ Unfortunately, as Robert MacMillan pointed out in the *Washington Post*, the debates over digital copyright tend to focus on either total content control at one extreme or complete digital anarchy at the other. "Those with a stake in the debate," he observes, "like to sound bleak warning notes about how piracy will destroy the Internet economy, or how the evil industry is locking down and homogenizing the greatest bastion of free expression the world has ever known."²⁴ A third alternative is possible, however, in the largely uncharted waters of a genuinely participatory, two-way media culture.

Today's youth, MacMillan adds—"... the millions of children and adolescents who make up the first generation to grow up with file sharing and downloads as the norm, rather than a novelty"—will have a fundamentally different regard for copyright than their parents. "This means that the conglomerates must master the Internet and its challenges or else watch their profits vanish," MacMillan concludes.²⁵ It also means that those who actively inhabit the online world—the so-called "netizens" who insist on more than a passive, spectator role online—must also ensure that

the abundant opportunities to "download" from dot-coms will be counterbalanced by opportunities for dot-orgs and individuals to "upload" creations of their own. In the process, the youth-driven, non-commercial forces and values visible in the "youth voice movement" could come into play over the next several years, resisting the uniformity and homogeneity that result from media consolidation and digital content controls.

These issues have already reached the legislative battleground. Far from the media spotlight, which focuses almost exclusively on the recording and motion picture industries' battles against file sharers, a handful of bills have surfaced in Congress that recognize the need to preserve "public space" in an otherwise corporate-dominated digital environment. The Consumer, Schools and Libraries Digital Rights Management Awareness Act and the Digital Media Consumers' Rights Act aim to restore "fair use" (concerning the use of copyrighted materials for such purposes as criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching, scholarship, and research) to its rightful place in copyright law. Perhaps the most important development will be the establishment of a funding program for online civic, educational, and cultural material. Two measures—the Spectrum Commons and Digital Dividends Act of 2003, and the Digital Opportunity Investment Trust Act—envision this public support for civic material.²⁷ As former Congressman Thomas Bliley has observed,

...compared to the colossal strides in hardware, software and broadband, when it comes to content—the material that's actually transmitted—we've taken only baby steps. When one envisions the possibilities, what could be made of today's technology, one realizes how far we really have to go.... Despite all our wealth and military strength, all our technological supremacy, if we are to remain competitive in the new century, we must fulfill our potential in the area of telecommunications—not just in entertainment, but in lifelong learning and content development.²⁸

Clearly, finding the proper balance in the online environment between the role of government and the play of market forces, between the imperatives of e-commerce and the needs of e-citizenship, will not come easily. Nor should anyone underestimate the power of the entertainment and media industries—the source of millions of dollars in campaign contributions every year, and equipped with elaborate lobbying apparatuses—in influencing Congress. But with the appearance of bills defending fair use, and with a small appropriation for the Digital Opportunity Investment Trust underscoring the need to find new ways to support and promote public-interest digital programming, the stage has been set for a movement that will do for the digital era what educational broadcast set-asides and arts and humanities funding did for the analog age.²⁹

In the meantime, quite apart from the legal implications of the new technologies, and distinct from the corporate sector's exploitation of their power, the benefits of the digital age for smaller, grassroots projects should not be overlooked. With the costs of promoting and disseminating mass-market entertainment at unprecedented levels, the field for smaller-scale, niche-market productions is suddenly wide open.³⁰ While the term “independent” has lost much of its meaning in the current media environment, covering everything from garage band CDs to multi-million-dollar movies, it is undeniable that there are more examples of small presses, self-produced record labels, and desktop video projects than ever before. As a low-cost distribution platform, moreover, the Internet excels at making such works more widely available. It has also rejuvenated the notion of the public domain. Project Gutenberg (<http://promo.net/pg/>), for example, the volunteer-driven project that dates back to the early 1970s, makes nearly 9,000 books freely available for downloading. And roughly seven books a minute are downloaded from the 1,600 e-books available free from the University of Virginia's

Electronic Text Center (<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/>). The broadband revolution will only accelerate the pace at which more demanding online applications, including streaming audio and video, will become a viable alternative for nonprofit organizations and individual producers alike. “We’re not that far from a time when artists and writers can distribute their own work and make a living doing so,” suggest PBS commentator Robert X. Cringely, “which makes the current literary and music establishments a lot less necessary. ... So we will have little movies and little records and little magazines on the Internet because the Internet is made up of so many different interest groups. For the larger population, there will still be Brittany [sic] Spears and Stephen King singing and writing for big labels.”³¹

Open Access/ Nondiscriminatory Transport

Regardless of the artist who produces it, the digital content of the twenty-first century will invariably find its way to our homes over commercial networks. If present trends continue, most of these networks will be those of cable companies (now serving roughly two-thirds of all homes connected to the high-speed Internet), with the balance likely controlled by one of the four remaining Baby Bell phone companies.³² Unless a political backlash derails the Federal Communications Commission's penchant for deregulation, these carriers will not offer the equality of service provided by the “common carriage” telephone system—that is, with all messages given equal priority and delivered at equal speed. Here, then, is the other side of the new-media copyright coin—not the ownership and control of the digital artifacts themselves (which is worrisome enough), but the ownership and control of the *networks* over which that material will be transmitted.

The potential impact of network ownership on content choice was made vividly clear by Paul Misener, Amazon.com's vice president for global public policy, in his testimony before the House Subcommittee on Telecommunications and the Internet:

Although perhaps subtle at first, the resulting change to the fundamental character of the Internet would be nothing short of radical and tragic. No longer would Americans be able to obtain for free or purchase all the myriad content they have grown accustomed to receiving at home. The Internet would metamorphose from being the ultimate "pull" medium, in which consumer choice is paramount, to being yet another cable TV-style "push" medium, where gate-keeping service providers decide what content Americans are allowed to obtain. By destroying unimpeded connectivity, the anti-competitive exercise of market power by a handful of broadband service providers would do to the Internet what even a nuclear strike could not.³³

Misener's remarks may sound melodramatic, but most observers agree that the battle over "open access" as we know that term—in which no less than 7,000 Internet service providers (ISPs) once plied their trade using dial-up connections—has been lost. The danger now is that the Federal Communications Commission, in pursuing its decidedly market-driven goals, will effectively render content diversity as endangered a concept as ISP diversity.³⁴ In this context, even works in the public domain are at risk, since the thoroughly commercialized and privatized broadband networks that the cable monopolies and Baby Bells introduce will likely serve civic expression and nonprofit culture as poorly as the mass media do today.

The analysts at Legg Mason have dubbed the debate surrounding such diversity "Open Access II," a cluster of issues involving "the extent to which the network provider can restrict the customers' use of the network":

Some have raised the fear that the Bell and cable companies could use their network control to undermine competitive offerings. In responding to such concerns, the government may have to address whether network providers can (1) restrict access to any Internet content, (2) restrict the user from running an application even if it does not harm the network and stays within bandwidth limits, (3) use routers to improve the performance of affiliated services (or undermine the performance of unaffiliated services), or (4) prohibit the attachment of devices to their Internet connection for reasons other than harm to the network or theft of service.³⁵

The FCC is still in the process of crafting the ground rules for the broadband Internet, but indications suggest that Chairman Michael Powell's deregulatory approach will increase the possibility of cable and Baby Bell ISPs becoming "last mile" gatekeepers of broadband content.³⁶ Traditionally, of course, the Internet's response to such gatekeepers and the bottlenecks they create was simply to "route around them," finding the next-best path in transmitting a packet from point A to point B. While such "best-effort" techniques may continue to obtain through large portions of the Internet, at present there simply aren't many alternatives to cable or DSL broadband connections to the home.

Spectrum Management

There still may be a way to "route around" even these wired obstructions, however, via the wireless networks that are now on the horizon. As James H. Johnston and J.H. Snider point out in their working paper for the New America Foundation,

The current debate over last-mile broadband policy is all too often a sterile debate focused on the wired infrastructure. The debate needs to shift to spectrum policy. Spectrum is not just a third last-mile broadband platform to compete with cable modems and DSL. It is the platform of choice.³⁷

The potential of wireless broadband is tied to federal policy—the way in which we organize and manage the radio spectrum. Traditionally, these electromagnetic waves have been mapped and divided into discrete bands and channels, many of which have been licensed to private broadcasters for their exclusive use. In his testimony before the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation in March 2003, speaking on behalf of several consumer groups and his own New America Foundation, Michael Calabrese endorsed two central recommendations about spectrum distribution:

First, that the traditional licensing system, based on rigid zoning, be replaced by new, more valuable usage rights with enhanced service, technical and market flexibility.

Second, that allocations of unlicensed spectrum for open and shared access by the public should be expanded—particularly for broadband wireless networking.³⁸

As Calabrese pointed out, advances in technology have made the new approach to spectrum management possible. In addition to low-cost, wireless Internet access, the development of software-defined radios permits the generation of “agile” radio transmissions that can dynamically share underutilized bands across wide ranges of the spectrum. Calabrese distanced himself, however, from other, more market-driven recommendations of the FCC spectrum task force:

We urge this Committee to deregulate spectrum management using a mechanism that is consistent with the current legal framework of public ownership, limited-term licensing and increased allocations of spectrum for unlicensed sharing... Fully flexible and hence more valuable licenses can be assigned *in exchange* for modest lease payments to the public by all commercial licensees. Rather than giving away valuable new spectrum rights to incumbents for nothing, or “selling” spectrum at one-off auctions that impose massive up-front payments on bidders, the Commission should “lease” spectrum for a set term of

years, allowing commercial users complete flexibility during the term of the lease.³⁹

Rather than simply pouring the proceeds of these spectrum auctions back into the Treasury, always an attractive option to legislators looking for tax-cutting, “quick fix” solutions, Calabrese made a more civically-oriented recommendation. “Perhaps the most relevant way to think about reinvesting spectrum revenue,” he suggested, “is for the purpose of fulfilling the ‘public interest obligations’ that originally justified giving broadcasters free access to the airwaves. These unmet public needs include quality children’s programming, educational innovation, local public service media and free media time for political candidates to communicate with voters.”⁴⁰

In this manner, then, the spectrum policy discussion comes full circle, with the revenues derived from the use of the nation’s airwaves supporting the civic and educational needs of those who actually own those airwaves—the American public. Perhaps through this kind of enlightened public stewardship of one of our most valuable natural resources—the electromagnetic spectrum—the nation’s commercial broadcasters will finally meet their public interest obligations.

Notes

¹ Steve Lohr, “‘New Media’: Ready for the Dustbin of History,” *New York Times* 11 May 2003.

² Scott Rosenberg, “Life on the Edge,” *Salon.com*, 13 Dec. 2002, <http://www.salon.com/tech/col/rose/2002/12/13/supernova/> (15 May 2003).

³ Tim McDonald, “Study: U.S. Teens are Generation ‘TM,’” *NewsFactor Network*, 21 June 2001, <http://www.newsfactor.com/perl/story/11444.html> (31 May 2003).

⁴ Jennifer Tanaka, “You ‘Pinging’ Me?” *Newsweek* 12 May 2003, <http://www.msnbc.com/news/908399.asp> (31 May 2003).

⁵ Amy Harmon, "Clique of Instant Messengers Expands Into the Workplace," *New York Times* 11 Mar. 2003. See also Joanna Glasner, "Getting the Message about IM," *Wired News*, 2 June 2003, <http://www.wired.com/news/business/0,1367,59046,00.html> (2 June 2003).

⁶ Jim Hu, "Instant Messaging, Corporate Software Vie for Workplace," CNET News.com, 13 Mar. 2003, <http://news.com.com/2009-1033-992348.html> (31 May 2003).

⁷ Kristi Essick, "Sending Out an SMS," PCWorld.com, 3 Aug. 2001, <http://www.pcworld.com/news/article/0,aid,57025,00.asp> (31 May 2003); Mizuko Ito, "A New Set of Social Rules for a Newly Wireless Society" *Japan Media Review* 14 Feb. 2003, <http://www.ojr.org/japan/wireless/1043770650.php> (31 May 2003).

⁸ Howard Rheingold, *Smart Mobs: The Next Social Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing, 2002). See also John Schwartz, "Motivating the Masses, Wirelessly," *New York Times* 22 July 2002; and Joel Garreau, "Cell Biology," *Washington Post* 31 July 2002.

⁹ SearchNetworking.com, http://searchnetworking.techtarget.com/sDefinition/0,,sid7_gci212769,00.html (31 May 2003). See also O'Reilly's OpenP2P website, <http://www.openp2p.com/>.

¹⁰ Malaika Costello-Dougherty, "Tech Wars: P-to-P Friends, Foes Struggle," PCWorld.com, 13 Mar. 2003, <http://www.pcworld.com/news/article/0,aid,109816,00.asp> (31 May 2003).

¹¹ Kazaa, "Sharing and the P2P Philosophy," http://www.kazaa.com/us/help/glossary/p2p_philosophy.htm (31 May 2003). The Creative Commons (<http://www.creativecommons.org/>) "is devoted to expanding the range of creative work available for others to build upon and share."

¹² Dan Gillmor, "Key Battles Forge Fate of Free Software," SiliconValley.com, 21 May 2003, http://www.siliconvalley.com/mld/siliconvalley/business/columnists/dan_gillmor/5911376.htm (31 May 2003).

¹³ Steven Johnson, "Use the Blog, Luke," Salon.com, 10 May 2002, <http://www.salon.com/tech/feature/2002/05/10/blogbrain/> (31 May 2003). Currently, search engines like Daypop (<http://www.daypop.com/>) and Blogdex (<http://blogdex.media.mit.edu/>) facilitate the searching of those Web logs, and Google is expected to refine its use of blog data as well.

¹⁴ Broadband Business Report, "Finding a way Forward from Critical Mass," ComputerUser.com, 26 Apr. 2003, <http://www.computeruser.com/news/03/04/26/news2.html> (22 May 2003); Grant Gross, "What's Holding Broadband Back?" PCWorld.com, 18 Apr. 2003,

<http://www.pcworld.com/news/article/0,aid,110340,00.asp> (22 May 2003). Citing broadband measurements made by ComScore Networks (<http://www.comscore.com/press/release.asp?id=322>), Liane Cassavoy of PCWorld.com notes that "...the speeds offered by broadband connections vary greatly.... Cable modems provide an almost 50 percent performance boost over DSL connections, according to the study. ComScore says the average speed of a cable modem is 708 kilobits per second, while the average DSL speed is only 467 kbps.... At the high end of the speed curve, subscribers see streaming video as true video, and can send and receive large email attachments with ease. At the bottom end, they could be paying a premium for a connection that's only four to six times as fast as dial-up. Liane Cassavoy, "Just How Fast is Broadband, Really?" PCWorld.com, 25 Apr. 2003, <http://www.pcworld.com/news/article/0,aid,110425,00.asp> (22 May 2003).

¹⁵ In addition to the two primary broadband delivery systems—cable and DSL—which have a 67 percent and 28 percent share of the market, respectively, two other delivery systems—wireless and power line—loom on the horizon as possibilities. See, for example, Cory Doctorow, "Can Wi-Fi Take Us the Last Mile?" *Business 2.0*, <http://www.business2.com/articles/mag/0,1640,47997,00.html> (20 May 2003); Dan Gillmor, "Broadband Competition Might Still be Possible," SiliconValley.com, 9 Mar. 2003, <http://www.siliconvalley.com/mld/siliconvalley/5352348.htm> (21 May 2003). For the possibility of residential power lines one day delivering broadband Internet service, see John Markoff and Matt Richtel, "Internet via the Power Grid: New Interest in Obvious Idea," *New York Times* 10 Apr. 2003. As FCC Chairman Michael Powell has observed, "This is within striking distance of being the third major broadband pipe into the home." Quoted in David Ho, "Power Lines Can Deliver Internet Access," SiliconValley.com, 9 Apr. 2003, <http://www.siliconvalley.com/mld/siliconvalley/5596999.htm> (20 May 2003).

¹⁶ Ken Belson and Matt Richtel, "America's Broadband Dream is Alive in Korea," *New York Times* 5 May 2003.

¹⁷ David D. Kirkpatrick, "War is Test of High-Speed Web," *New York Times* 24 Mar. 2003.

¹⁸ "Wi-Fi: It's Fast, It's Here—and It Works," BusinessWeek online, 1 Apr. 2002, http://www.businessweek.com/technology/content/apr2002/tc2002041_1823.htm (23 May 2003).

¹⁹ Todd Wallack, "Wi-Fi Fans: Grassroots Techies Want to Build a Wireless Internet Network across the Bay Area," *San Francisco Chronicle* 30 June 2002, <http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2002/06/30/BU161955.DTL&type=tech> (31 May 2003).

²⁰ Chris Taylor, "Will You Buy WiFi?" *Time* online edition. 21 Apr. 2003, <http://www.time.com/time/globalbusiness/article/0,9171,1101030421-443172,00.html> (31 May 2003).

²¹ The FCC relaxed media ownership limits in June 2003, paving the way for additional mergers among broadcast station groups and newspaper chains, although mounting opposition to further media consolidation (as chronicled in the Center for Digital Democracy's website at <http://www.democraticmedia.org/issues/mediaownership/index.php>) may produce a Congressional revision of the new FCC policies.

²² "Info With a Ball and Chain," *Newsweek* 23 June 2003, <http://www.msnbc.com/news/926304.asp> (13 July 2003).

²³ Although the "public interest, convenience, and necessity" is mentioned over 100 times in the Communications Act of 1934 and its subsequent incarnations over the years, the concept has never been adequately defined, and is scarcely a factor in the operation of radio and television stations today. Efforts to arrive at new public interest obligations commensurate with the enhanced power and capacity of digital television have thus far been unsuccessful. See, for example, the online archives of the Advisory Committee on Public Interest Obligations of Digital Television Broadcasters (<http://www.benton.org/publibrary/policy/tv/piac.html>).

²⁴ Robert MacMillan. "Internet Sparks a Copyright Fire," *Washingtonpost.com*, 24 June 2003, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A23481-2003Jun23.html> (11 July 2003).

²⁵ Robert MacMillan. "Internet Sparks a Copyright Fire."

²⁶ Sen. Sam Brownback (R-Kan.) introduced the Consumer, Schools and Libraries Digital Rights Management Awareness Act (S. 1621) in 2003 in an effort to restore the balance between protecting digital content and preserving fair-use rights, by not letting digital rights management technologies (such as the TV "broadcast" flag) prevent people from exercising their fair-use rights. Robert MacMillan, "Related Federal Legislation," *Washingtonpost.com*, 24 June 2003, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn?pagename=article&node=&contentId=A23435-2003Jun23¬Found=true> (11 July 2003). H.R. 107, the Digital Media Consumers' Rights Act, introduced in 2002 and again in 2003 by Rep. Rick Boucher (D-Va.), would

restore the rights of individuals to make copies of software, music, and other copyrighted content for personal use, currently forbidden by the DMCA.

²⁷ The Spectrum Commons and Digital Dividends Act of 2003 (H.R. 1396), introduced by Rep. Edward J. Markey (D-MA), proposes to create a permanent trust fund using the proceeds of the auction of public airwaves to fund public interest telecommunications initiatives. The Digital Opportunity Investment Trust Act (S. 1854), co-sponsored by Sen. Christopher J. Dodd (D-CT), Sen. Olympia Snowe (R-ME), and Sen. Dick Durbin (D-IL), would fulfill the vision first put forward by former FCC Chairman Newton Minow and former NBC News and PBS President Lawrence Grossman, as described in their Digital Promise website (<http://www.digitalpromise.org/index.asp>).

²⁸ Thomas J. Bliley, "Seeking to Fulfill the Promise of Telecommunications," *The Hill* 9 July 2003, http://www.thehill.com/op_ed/070903.aspx (24 July 2003).

²⁹ Although the Digital Opportunity Investment Trust has not yet been created, \$750,000 was appropriated in 2003 for the Federation of American Scientists to study the project.

³⁰ See, for example, Lynne Margolis, "Independents' Day," *Christian Science Monitor* 11 Apr. 2003, <http://www.csmonitor.com/2003/0411/p13s02-alm.html> (13 July 2003).

³¹ Robert X. Cringely, "Resistance is Futile: How Peer-to-Peer File Sharing Is Likely to Change Big Media," I, Cringely/The Pulpit, <http://www.pbs.org/cringely/pulpit/pulpit20021128.html> (13 July 2003).

³² In time, various forms of wireless transmission may add new options to the cable and telco broadband "duopoly," but for the immediate future, cable and DSL networks will dominate.

³³ Testimony of Paul Misener, vice president for global public policy, Amazon.com, before the House Subcommittee on Telecommunications and the Internet, 21 July 2003, <http://energycommerce.house.gov/108/Hearings/07212003hearing1024/Misener1610.htm> (24 July 2003).

³⁴ Testimony of Robert Pepper, chief, Policy Development Office of Strategic Planning and Policy Analysis, Federal Communications Commission, before the House Subcommittee on Telecommunications and the Internet, 21 July 2003, <http://energycommerce.house.gov/108/Hearings/07212003hearing1024/Pepper1602.htm> (24 July 2003).

³⁵ Legg Mason, "Beyond UNE-P: The Edge vs. the Network—a/k/a 'Open Access II,'" 5 Dec. 2002. In response to these concerns over anti-competitive and discriminatory behavior, Ken Ferree, chief of the Media Bureau at the FCC, claims that existing antitrust laws will

offer sufficient protection: “The irony of course is that, if the kinds of commercial arrangements that the proponents of openness regulation fear actually come about—and if they are as pernicious as suggested—no regulatory check should be necessary. The kinds of conduct that have been posited are precisely what the antitrust laws were intended to combat. If distributors actually start using whatever market power they have at the distribution level to eliminate rivals or favor some vertically integrated enterprise in an anticompetitive way, we would expect the antitrust authorities to have more than a little interest.” W. Kenneth Ferree, chief, Media Bureau, Federal Communications Commission, Speech delivered at the Progress & Freedom Foundation Conference on “Net Neutrality,” 27 June 2003, available for download at <http://www.fcc.gov/mb/> (24 July 2003).

³⁶ Jeffrey Benner, “Getting a Lock on Broadband,” Salon.com, 7 June 2002, <http://www.salon.com/tech/feature/2002/06/07/broadband/> (23 July 2003).

³⁷ James H. Johnston and J.H. Snider, “Breaking the Chains: Unlicensed Spectrum as a Last-Mile Broadband Solution,” Spectrum Series Working Paper #7, June 2003, New America Foundation, <http://www.newamerica.net/index.cfm?pg=article&pubID=1250> (25 July 2003).

³⁸ Testimony of Michael Calabrese, director, Spectrum Policy Program, New America Foundation, before the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation, 6 Mar. 2003, p. 1, http://www.newamerica.net/Download_Docs/pdfs/Pub_File_1165_1.pdf (25 July 2003).

³⁹ Testimony of Michael Calabrese, pp. 3-4.

⁴⁰ Calabrese also endorsed the aforementioned Digital Opportunity Investment Trust: “Another compelling use for spectrum revenue focuses on modernizing American education. The ‘Digital Opportunity Investment Trust,’ initially proposed by former FCC Chairman Newton Minow and former PBS President Lawrence Grossman, would support innovative uses of digital technologies for education, lifelong learning, and the transformation of our civic and cultural institutions. Under their proposal, an initial \$18 billion in future spectrum revenue would be allocated to capitalize the trust fund, yielding a permanent revenue stream of \$1 billion or more for investments. We urge the Committee to earmark future spectrum revenue for this important purpose.” Testimony of Michael Calabrese, p. 6.

Chapter 8

Facing the Future: The Challenge of the Youth Civic Web

Having come of age in the digital era, it is the generation of teens and twenty-somethings that will have the best opportunity to redefine and reshape the online world. Young people can help ensure that the high-speed networks of the future will serve community needs as effectively as they serve commercial interests. The tools, certainly, will be there. Peer-to-peer technologies, blogs and RSS publishing, wireless networks, and “smart” broadcasting all have the potential to place new power in the hands of end users, transforming what were once passive audiences of the media into far more active participants. This study has found an abundance of online efforts already underway that are designed to harness these tools in engaging young people more fully with their communities and their government. Taken together, these projects offer a glimpse at the *potential* of digital media to respond to youth disengagement from civic life, with myriad interactive features and a wealth of civic content:

- An unmatched abundance of information, resources, and documents on civic topics, readily available to all who possess the requisite computer connections and English and computer literacy.
- Access to experts, both adult and peer. The Internet makes it easy to find people with specialized knowledge on topics local, national, and international, substantive and procedural, online and off.
- Ease of conducting basic civic tasks, from voter registration and communicating with elected officials, to finding a suitable volunteer position and advocating for a position or policy.
- Sharing of strategies as well as “facts.” Some civic websites provide information on how to organize other young people, advocate for legislation, secure press coverage, raise funds, or simply learn more about a particular topic. As such, the Web becomes a tool for learning open-ended lessons with the potential for broad applicability.
- Opportunities for youth to showcase their own creations. The initiative and the “voice” that young people are afforded online increases their sense of being valued participants, and multiplies the opportunities for their input to affect the decisions of others. Youth creativity also generates more resources for others to draw on.
- Interchange with distant and different peoples and perspectives. Civic discourse is based on each person’s ability to consider relevant facts from multiple points of view, converse with one another, and enlarge their opinions and understandings. By bringing new voices into the mix, the Internet helps build these fundamental skills.

- Structured forums for high-quality civic discourse. Newly emerging online approaches such as small-group discussions promote frankness of speech, participation for all on an equal footing, freedom from stereotyping, and accountability for one's statements.
- Inspirational portraits of young people and their achievements. Many websites introduce us to youth whose activities in the civic realm provide exciting real-life models of what young people can accomplish.

The Internet, quite simply, breaks the schema of one-way, top-down communications that have long defined the mass media. This new paradigm has powerful implications. No longer do the media dictate the “truth” to us, the audience. We now have the opportunity to “talk back,” to inform others, to share our stories and offer our own interpretations of the news and events that affect all of us. This newfound power, admittedly foreign to those who grew up in the thrall of the “old media,” is particularly important to youth, who are not only in the process of defining their personalities and constructing their understanding of their role in the world, but who have ready access to the technologies that can enhance these tasks.

Civic websites offer this power of self-expression in ways that range from mechanistic to truly creative. Online polls and questionnaires invite youth to register their opinions, and websites use them as one way to increase youth involvement and youth-generated content. However, polls are pre-constructed channels that offer very narrow choices, whereas the Internet excels at promoting creativity and initiative. Almost a third of the websites we surveyed provide opportunities for visitors to submit essays, articles, reviews, op-eds, poetry or art work to the site. In fact, in the past few years the Internet has created a host of entirely new vehicles for self-expression. Youth are

now speaking and acting on civic topics in ways that didn't exist for their parents, or even for those who were youth just a decade ago: online publishing, message boards and email discussion forums, automated emails to elected officials, “donate now” buttons, online games on civic topics, and blogs.

This capacity for self-expression on the Web is ideally suited to the adolescent tasks of peer communication and identity development. It has allowed the Web to become a prime source for youth statements of their perspectives, priorities, and concerns—an unmediated youth voice—on a wide range of topics. In the process, the interactive capacity of the Web provides young people with opportunities to hone a variety of civic skills, such as the following:

- develop and articulate their thinking on issues of public concern;
- build the habits of initiative, analysis, and independent thinking;
- create forums where youth with differing opinions can speak to each other, and
- develop their own sense of being invested in civic issues and actively involved in the civic arena.

The real test, however, will come in the determination of whether such forms of self-expression can be sustained beyond the occasional bursts of activity surrounding extraordinary events (e.g., the 9/11 tragedy), and whether, more importantly, these discussions can be interconnected in some fashion to become a genuine civic *movement* online—with meaningful offline implications. Glimmers of such a movement can be found in the kind of “purposeful” writings of HarlemLive and WireTap, for example, and in even more activist-oriented sites such as Free the Planet! and

United Students Against Sweatshops. These isolated examples, however, are far from the norm of online youth communications, which remain much more closely associated with popular culture than with populist outcry. An online civic movement may be in the making, but its arrival is still a ways off, and much remains to be accomplished before its survival is ensured.

Do they increase civic engagement?

Having identified, analyzed, and categorized several hundred civic websites for young people, a logical next step would be to identify their actual effects. Do these websites actually contribute to long-term practices of civic engagement?

We regret that these questions fell beyond the scope of the present study, which restricted itself in large measure to examining online content rather than assessing the impact of that content. Such issues are, however, on the minds of those who hope to promote civic engagement, and those who create civic websites. Many commercial sites with civic content study the practices of their user populations, but with an eye toward gleaning information on young people's opinions, values, habits and purchasing practices—market research, in short, conducted on often-unsuspecting site visitors. These findings, needless to say, remain proprietary.

A very few of the largest, best-funded civic websites have been able to study their own site users, in these instances with more civic purposes in mind. YouthNOISE, for example, deployed extensive market research and trend analysis in designing its website, and conducts “user testing” to identify the issues on which teens are likely to become involved. It also uses sophisticated technologies to track site-registered users' online behavior: how often they visit the site, what pages they view and what they do there. YouthNOISE

plans to adapt some of these same methods into a system for probing and assessing measurable indicators of civic engagement. As this report notes, if the findings of such research could be shared with the larger youth civic community, it would prove valuable in identifying best practices for increasing youth civic engagement.

Our study did not—and could not—measure the *impact* of the Web in promoting youth civic engagement; that is an important task that lies ahead. Rather, our study was based primarily on an analysis of online civic content designed for young people. To a lesser extent, through interviews and secondary source materials, we also looked at the organizations behind the websites in an effort to understand their intended goals, the strategies they employed, and the obstacles they encountered. What we were able to analyze, then, were efforts at promoting civic engagement. Any assessment of the results will require additional research to evaluate systematically the impact of these websites on the young people that use them.

Nonetheless, several initial observations can be made about the impact of civic websites. First, it is clear that the Web is already integrated into most young people's window on the world, and that it offers them a broader perspective than any before. In many ways, the Web constitutes a gigantic informational resource on a wide variety of topics, including civic affairs. Beyond informational use, youth civic websites open doors to access and participation in civic projects.

Second, research into youth development suggests that, as a source for learning civic skills, values, and behaviors, websites will be most effective if used over an arc of time.¹ Our study did not allow us to perceive how often any individual user visited a given website, or how sustained this use was over time. Where some glimpses of this are possible—for example, on message boards—it appears that many users come and go. This in-

termittent use is not likely to reinforce behavior-based skills, which require repeated use and practice. This suggests that websites may offer their greatest impact in teaching civic skills when used within a well-defined community that can commit to sustained use—whether a youth group, a school, or a civic organization with a program designed for ongoing as opposed to one-time involvement.

Third, given the hundreds of civic websites that exist, and their tremendous variation, generalizations about their impact are of limited value. Impact will inevitably depend on which websites are used, how they are used, by whom, with what kind of guidance, and for what purposes. If civic websites are to be utilized in the classroom—and we believe they should be, for the richness of their content and the introduction they offer to real-life issues and situations—they will have to be used selectively. To maximize their impact and their appropriateness, educators and researchers will need to develop rigorous criteria in developing online content and selecting websites that meet young people's needs and pedagogic and curricular standards.

A question hindering this study in particular is our decision to examine only those websites that deliberately speak to young people. This choice was necessary as a precondition to examining *how* they address young people. However, there may be an element of inaccuracy, if not condescension, in thinking that youth prefer to go to sites that address them as “young people.” We could just as well posit the opposite: that the older the youth are (or want to feel), the more they will respond well to sites that treat them as adults, not as youth. This, if it were true, would have the effect of shifting downward the age range of young people actually utilizing the websites designed for youth.

A final question continues to nag at us as we consider the elements that attract young people, or don't, to civic websites. This has to do with the efficacy of the websites in producing real effects. Do these sites allow young people to produce results in the offline, non-virtual world, or are they only “practice”? There is reason to think that at least some young people will have greater interest in activities that truly leave a mark on the world. An example of this concern for impact appears in a document entitled “The New Student Politics—The Wingspread Statement on Student Civic Engagement,” where a group of engaged students give voice to the vision and goals that guide their own civic and political engagement. While many of them reject voting and other traditional means of engagement, they articulate clearly their desire to create concrete change: “We want to address immediate problems in our communities.... [W]e become aware of issues and examine strategies for solving problems,” the report declares.² Indeed, the desire to see results is precisely one of the reasons why these students engage in community service. For these young people—admittedly at the upper age range of the population this study is concerned with—the question of impact is key.

Yet few of the websites we examined speak in terms of measurable outcome, impact, or change. For many, it seems, the process—making the effort—was implicitly deemed enough. Is this the lesson we want to convey to “emerging citizens”? Where the first steps of civic engagement are involved, perhaps it is. Young people who have been entirely uninvolved, uninterested or unexposed to civic and social issues must first have their attention captured, their emotions touched, and their imaginations engaged. Civic websites can do that, we believe—through articles, poems, and quizzes, through message boards and overseas pen pals, through links to offline volunteering or mobilization for political advocacy. These

are, after all, pieces of a large and long-term process designed to mold young people's interests, values, and habits. No one piece will do it all.

What strikes us as curious, however, is the lack of attention paid to the end result. After all, a lack of capacity to bring citizen power to bear—to create results—seems to be an underlying cause of civic disengagement in this country. Certainly it seems at the heart of disenchantment with voting. Where websites seek only to inform, to “model” skills, or amplify a “voice,” without creating an effect, the path to fully active citizenship seems to have stopped halfway.

The theoretical literature reviewed for this study suggests that websites can make significant contributions to civic literacy. The power of the Internet to provide access to information seems, at this point, indisputable; what requires greater study and thought is the question of the types, forms, and quantities of information that are most useful to young people, at what stages in their civic development, and for what purposes. Most civic websites make minimal use if any of games, quizzes, simulations, collaborative-learning projects, and other activities that tap the Internet's capacity for interaction. As these forms come into greater use, and before the nonprofit sector is asked to invest in them, further research seems warranted to identify the best and most effective uses.

The impact of the Internet in shaping the affective view of young people towards community, participation, and social change is less clear. As with television, film, video, and advertising, it is to be expected that the Internet as a medium will fashion youth tastes and values as well as reflect them. However, the impact of any given website is much harder to assess. We have commented on the ways in which some websites draw on commercial youth culture to attract young people to civic content, establish positive associations, and give civic activ-

ity an appropriately “cool” or acceptable aura. However, this use of symbolic attachment only begins to scratch the surface of a much larger question of how attachment to the civic realm is formed. In more substantive terms, civic affect also refers to the sense that one's own, specific participation is valued and heard.

We would place “youth voice” in a highly privileged position for contributing to this sense of being a valued and valuable participant. In and of itself, youth voice lies at a strategic intersection, linking as it does the development of skills for civic discourse with expression of one's civic literacy. This makes youth self-expression a valuable tool for practicing these building blocks of civic engagement. Add to that the adolescent passion for communication, especially with peers, and the extensive use of the Internet by youth, and the potential civic significance of the Internet multiplies manyfold. Youth voice on civic topics is apparent on the Web in young people's journalistic articles, essays, poetry, videos, graphic arts, and other vivid expressions.

The websites we found offer a wealth of information, opportunity, skill building, and modeling for youth civic engagement, and some have great potential as didactic tools. However, they are unlikely to be put to use in formal programs for civic education until they are evaluated systematically and in some cases improved. Therefore, useful follow-up research and applications are needed, such as the following:

- Develop criteria for judging websites as useful to and appropriate for programmatic efforts to promote civic engagement. Assessment could utilize a variety of criteria, including those discussed in this report: contributions to civic literacy, skills, and attachment; arc of practice over time; degree of youth voice/promotion of initiative; and vision of citizenship.

- Disseminate any such criteria developed. Appropriate audiences would include civic and youth development organizations, service learning organizations, classroom teachers of civics, government and social studies, and the nonprofit sector, broadly speaking.
- Encourage and train youth-oriented organizations to utilize their websites consciously to strengthen civic engagement. Many youth-focused organizations with civic objectives fail to use their websites to lay in place the building blocks of civic engagement (i.e., literacy, skills, and attachment). Practical “how-to” information and resources should be developed (possibly utilizing as models some of the websites described in this study), identifying promising practices in regard to characteristics, criteria, and techniques for effective online civic work with youth. A strategy may also be needed to encourage youth groups to explicitly address the meta-goals of civic engagement as well as more immediate organizational projects and goals.
- Assess the effectiveness of those civic websites that already use online quizzes and games to make learning fun and to introduce new dimensions, such as collaborative decision-making. Given the tremendous popularity of online games for entertainment, these initiatives should be studied and new ones encouraged.
- Examine new applications of, and tools for, youth civic websites. So-called “social software,” for example, is being developed that can expand the effectiveness and the reach of civic ventures. These applications are designed to implement social networks online in ways that empower individuals, communities, and organizations to distribute knowledge more quickly and efficiently, create more transparent and public conversations, and increase mutual trust. They clearly call for research and experimentation.
- Explore the diffusion of civic Web work into the civic curricula of schools, which would vastly increase the use of this enormous pool of material. In addition, the capacity of schools to incorporate structured analysis of and reflection on website content could offset such problems as lack of balance or objectivity, and the multiple problems associated with message boards (uncivil tone, non-factual assertions, confusion of civic content with personal content, etc.).
- Employ schools as testing grounds for such promising techniques as online small-group discussion circles. This online format appears to offset some of the negative dynamics that young people confront in face-to-face classroom discussion, while allowing for the participation of different groups (classes, ages, nationalities) in a structured and civil civic debate.
- Remind the broader nonprofit community, especially groups that do *not* currently address youth, that their websites offer an excellent opportunity to attract, educate, and recruit a new generation of supporters and activists. Outreach is needed to encourage nonprofits to speak to young people, both on specific issues and as a means of strengthening civic development. Non-youth-oriented civic groups must be schooled in the techniques of welcoming young people in meaningful ways. These include framing issues in ways that are relevant to youth; accommodating young people’s different levels of knowledge and sophistication; providing instruction, models, or mentors; inviting—and using—youth input; and offering young people concrete skills and pertinent experience.

Viability and sustainability remain serious problems

Today's Web offers features—such as Flash animation, streaming audio and video—that bring it ever closer to television. Few civic websites for youth incorporate these bells and whistles; few can afford to. As the broadband revolution places a premium on such advanced features, the distance between more complex (and well-funded) commercial sites and much more pedestrian non-commercial sites will only grow. At the same time, even more routine, not-so-innovative uses of the Internet have become vital to many civic and non-profit organizations:

- “Brochureware”—static Web pages that present an organization's mission, programs and contact information—is as indispensable to nonprofits, these days, as a telephone listing.
- Electronic newsletters are light years beyond their paper counterparts. They can be updated instantaneously, archived online, readily offer greater volume and depth of information, and can easily link to other resources.
- Volunteering portals and “donate now” buttons allow organizations to draw on far greater resource pools for serving their constituencies.

The fact that these and similar features have become standard elements as opposed to innovations is a reflection of the revolution of expectations created by the Internet. In the words of analyst Andrew Blau,

As networks change the experience of distance and time and allow for both more and faster feedback, they create new assumptions among users. In a growing number of settings, customers expect quick attention.... Individual donors, members, subscribers, or members of the public seeking a service provided by a nonprofit organization will expect the same responsiveness....

But while such features convey benefits to users, they also impose costs on the providers: both the initial purchase of software and hardware, and the future investment in purchases and training, as software and hardware become obsolete and must be replaced.³

As a consequence, many sites are still trying to come up with strategies for sustainability. They are going through a period of experimentation with content, formats, and business models. Some nonprofit organizations have formed alliances with commercial online ventures in order to attain more visibility. But few commercial ventures have managed to figure out the vicissitudes of the “e-economy,” either, and thus the nonprofit sector is not alone in its uncertain prospects online.

If the dot-com crash of 2000-2002 proved anything, in fact, it made the fragility of the commercial Internet economy abundantly clear. In an instant, or so it seemed, the Web's promise of the 90s—build it and they will come—yielded the sad truth of the millennium: even if they come, profits won't necessarily follow. The proposed revenue streams of the Internet—advertising, subscription fees, pay-per-click programming, and various other forms of e-commerce—were too new and untested to withstand an economic downturn. Venture capital kept the balloon afloat for a while, but in the end the virtual world proved all too susceptible to the same economic laws of gravity that govern the real world.

Nor was the dot-org sector of nonprofit institutions on the Net immune from such forces. Few may have suffered the *Hindenburg*-like fate of Excite@Home or Webvan, but the recessionary climate online also proved stifling to the digital plans of nonprofits, many of whose websites withered. Fortunately, the do-it-yourself technology of the Web allowed smaller operations (including many of those surveyed in this report) to

flourish. Fueled in part by a federal E-rate program that brought heavily discounted Internet connectivity to schools and libraries across the country, stimulated by the public-service examples of the Department of Commerce's Technology Opportunities Program, and free from the imperative of generating profits, the noncommercial Web has brought forth blooms at least as striking, and perhaps more sturdy, than the hot-house flowers supported by venture capitalists.⁴

Compared to the restrictions of old media (the finite number of print and broadcast outlets and their high costs of operation), the Internet appears to be a boundless frontier. With millions of websites and billions of pages, the Web can be said to have something for everyone. In practice, however, the limits of the Web's diversity soon become all too apparent. In the new media, just as in the old, size does matter. Matthew Hindman and Kenneth Neil Cukier, fellows at the National Center for Digital Government at Harvard University, have examined the question of diversity of news sources available on the Internet. In an article entitled "More News, Less Diversity," Hindman and Cukier argue that the Internet, contrary to appearances, does not actually increase the number of information sources that Americans see. While this might seem counterintuitive given the diversity of sites available online, the reality, according to Hindman and Cukier, is that "...almost all this diversity is ignored.

Users may be able to choose from millions of sites, but most go to only a few. This isn't an accident or the result of savvy branding. It's because Internet traffic follows a winner-take-all pattern that is much more ruthless than people realize. Relying on links and search engines, most people are directed to a few very successful sites; the rest remain invisible to the majority of users. The result is that there's an even greater media concentration online than in the offline world.⁵

Other scholars have described this phenomenon—the "power law distribution" of incoming links to any given site—which results in an economy of online information that is dominated by a comparative handful of well-connected sites. "The formation of links," observe Boris Galitsky and Mark Levene, "is explained through the process of 'preferential attachment,' where sites having more incoming links are more likely to be linked to than sites having less incoming links, leading to the 'rich get richer' phenomenon."⁶ Large, well-established sites, not surprisingly, have more links to one another than to smaller sites. Less predictably, these smaller sites tend also to have more links to larger sites than to smaller ones.⁷ Search engines—the "gatekeepers of the Web"—play a key role in the consolidation of power of the Internet's marketplace of ideas.⁸

Even in the generally not-for-profit realm of online political communities, the Web's predictable traffic patterns prevail. Analyzing three million Web pages covering such issues as abortion and capital punishment, Hindman and Cukier found that each website's traffic correlates directly with the number of links to that website. Popular sites, they note, are linked-to more frequently the more they grow in popularity. As an example, the authors note that

...although there are more than 13,000 Web pages on the subject of gun control, two-thirds of all hyperlinks point to the 10 most popular sites. In the case of capital punishment, the top 10 sites receive 63 percent of the total number of links on the topic. In every category of content we examined, more than half the Web sites have only a single link to them.⁹

The effect in this civic realm as in all others online, according to the study, is one of "a staggering degree of consolidation."

Nourishing and Sustaining the Civic Web

If the civic Web is to be sustained in the twenty-first century, it will require the same special treatment that we accorded education, arts, and the humanities in the twentieth. These sectors have long been the recipients of extensive public and private funding, with the private sector (most notably the Ford Foundation in the 1960s) leading the way with innovative programs in support of the arts and culture. Thus far, no single foundation has emerged to do for digital culture what Ford and others did for analog culture, and it may have to be the government that will step into this breach. If so, the stage has been set for such an entrance with the appearance of legislative proposals along the lines of the Wireless Technology Investment and Digital Dividends Act of 2002 and the Digital Opportunity Investment Trust Act. The former, sponsored by Rep. Edward J. Markey (D-MA), would create a permanent trust fund using the proceeds of the auction of public airwaves to fund public interest telecommunications initiatives.

Similarly, the Digital Opportunity Investment Trust Act, co-sponsored by Sen. Christopher J. Dodd (D-CT) and Sen. James M. Jeffords (I-VT), would fulfill the vision first put forward by former FCC Chairman Newton Minow and former NBC News and PBS President Lawrence Grossman, as described in their Digital Promise website (<http://www.digitalpromise.org/index.asp>).¹⁰ Minow and Grossman conceived the idea of a public interest trust fund, based on the proceeds of spectrum auctions, to support new-media projects that would “enable the nation’s schools, universities, libraries and museums to reach outside their walls to millions of people in the U.S. and throughout the world.” While Markey’s bill represents not quite as expansive a vision as that of the Digital Promise (which proposed “to do for education in the U.S. what the National Science Foundation does for science, the National

Institutes of Health do for health, and DARPA does for defense”), it nonetheless advances three important goals:

- Creation of a permanent Digital Dividends Trust Fund: based on the proceeds of spectrum auctions, the trust fund would support both “human capital telecommunications investments” (e.g., teacher training, educational software development, digitizing archival material, and AmeriCorps technology projects), and “broadband infrastructure investments for public access and rural development” (e.g., projects that attack the digital divide in rural and inner-city locations).
- Establishment of a “Spectrum Commons”: by setting aside two bands of frequencies (20 MHz of spectrum below 2 GHz and another band between 2 and 6 GHz), the bill would release airwaves for unlicensed public use as an open wireless platform for communications.
- Guarantee of Policy-based Spectrum Management: vowing to put the “policy horse back in front of the auction cart,” Markey stresses that his bill would ensure that specific policy objectives and goals (e.g., the transitions to digital television and 3G wireless service) would be set *before* spectrum auctions are scheduled.

It is difficult to predict such legislation’s chances for success, but as one of the first congressional proposals that seek neither to serve special corporate interests nor to deregulate still further the telecom industry, Markey’s bill and related measures represent an important step in realizing the full civic potential of the World Wide Web.

Increased private sector support will be needed, too, and as we await the philanthropic community’s gradual awakening to its responsi-

bilities in this area, a series of new public-private pump-priming measures might be in order. Broadcasters, for example, might be relieved of their public-interest obligations in the new digital arena by making payments to a public-service programming fund (much as corporations now purchase pollution credits).¹¹ Entertainment conglomerates, in exchange for the expanded copyright protections that they are now seeking in Congress, could be required to contribute to a public domain fund that would support the creation of new work that might be freely shared for educational and other noncommercial purposes. That public domain, finally, might be immeasurably enhanced by a streamlined rights-and-permissions clearance process for noncommercial programming, effectively freeing the countless hours of content, originally produced for public broadcasting, that now languish in storage.

Nor is it too early to begin thinking much more expansively about the future of public broadcasting in the digital era, at once restoring the role of the *public* in that system by providing more opportunities for community participation, and exploring new opportunities for alternative and grass-roots expression that the digital technologies might afford. In this connection, the existing Corporation for Public Broadcasting should be replaced by a much more ambitious Corporation for Public *Telecommunications*. Such a body, drawing on both public and private funding, would be charged with nurturing noncommercial programming across a broad range of platforms, from traditional public broadcasting and PEG channels to the latest experiments in streaming media, wireless technologies, and P2P networks.

But more than funding alone will be needed if the online civic sector is ever to mature beyond the scattered collection of unconnected parts that it is today. It is encouraging, certainly, to point to the online success stories of youth-serving and grass-roots organizations. But what is notably

missing is a much more coherent sense of the *sum* of those parts. Just as we distinguish, say, between a public library and a book store, or between a nature preserve and an amusement park in the real world, so is there a very real distinction between a community network and a commercial portal. A clearer sense of the dimensions of the online civic sector, fostered by much more collaboration among the civic, educational, and cultural organizations that too often compete rather than cooperate in their online efforts, would go a long way toward affording the nonprofit sector the same “brand awareness” that the AOLs, Yahoos, and Microsofts of the online world currently enjoy.

Even with the noblest intentions and the best-laid plans, the success of the civic Web is by no means ensured. Other developments, especially the closed architecture and tight control of the new high-speed networks as we make the transition from the dial-up to the broadband Internet, will play a role, and they have the potential to cut short the promise of a genuine online civic sector. In this connection, a comparison of the original dial-up Internet and its more recent broadband incarnation is instructive.

The Internet was designed using “end-to-end” architecture: The content that flows over the Internet is determined by the end users; no entity stands in the middle, filtering, censoring, or otherwise manipulating content. Rather, the lines that carry Internet messages are neutral in regard to the content. The owners of the Internet’s physical “highway”—backbone networks and telephone companies—do not control the traffic that they bear.

This state of affairs is determined not by the technology but by public policy. The telephone lines on which the dial-up Internet relies are subject to “common carriage” regulations, which require that the phone companies provide non-preferential

treatment to all customers. No caller's message can be given priority over another's, no data can be rejected because of their origin, destination, or content. Another essential policy, known as "open access," ensures that thousands of Internet service providers compete to carry Internet traffic. At their peak, some 7,000 ISPs provided Internet access, including for-profit companies large and small, nonprofit, and community ISPs. Most of them exist only because the large phone companies are required by law to provide other ISPs with access to their phone lines.

In moving to a high-speed, broadband system, however, these two essential provisions—common carriage and open access—will no longer hold. Cable operators are not required to share their networks with other ISPs, and there is mounting pressure in Congress to give phone companies the same free rein over their DSL services. As a consequence, there is no guarantee that the openness and diversity that have long been the hallmarks of the Internet will prevail in the broadband future. Ironically, while we have made great strides in closing the so-called digital divide that separated the haves from the have-nots (i.e., those with access to computers and the Internet, and those without), we may soon be facing a far more variegated set of divisions. With the commodification of broadband content and the introduction of tiered levels of service (including premium offerings far beyond the means of most nonprofits), the new-media playing field will reflect the same big-business tilt that has long affected the old media. The power of broadband communications will largely reside with those with the sufficient resources and market clout to reach mass audiences.

By further marginalizing the content created by community groups, youth, and nonprofits, these developments in the broadband marketplace will inevitably have a powerful effect on the vitality of the "civic Internet." Especially in today's eco-

nomie climate, where nonprofits and youth groups face cutbacks in their funding and retrenchment in their programs, an Internet based on ability to pay would cut deeply into their ability to use their websites in advanced and youth-appealing ways. We conclude that the well-being of the civic Internet is at stake. We therefore make three basic policy recommendations:

- Specific information on key issues of digital media policy should be provided to youth civic groups and to nonprofit organizations generally.
- Youth civic websites should be utilized as a channel to let young people and the organizations that serve them know that their "space" on the Internet may be endangered.
- Young people should be encouraged to use the Internet to express their perspectives on the form and function of the Internet. "Youth voice" should be made a prominent feature in discussions about the future of digital communication.

The Civic Challenge

The civic Web at its best—a vibrant, visible and freely accessible "commons" where information and ideas flow freely from a variety of perspectives, and social, cultural, and political differences are discussed rather than dismissed—can foster genuine civic engagement both online and off. This is the challenge, and the promise, facing the online civic community. It is a challenge best met through sharing ideas, linking websites and efforts, and embracing a conscious common identity and set of goals. The presence of youth-oriented civic websites and the participation of youth will bring to this task new vigor, resourcefulness, and vision.

CSM

Notes

¹ Reed W. Larson, "Toward a Psychology of Positive Youth Development," *American Psychologist* 55.1 (2000); Jack M. McLeod, "Media and Civic Socialization of Youth," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 27S (2000).

² <http://www.compact.org/wingspread/new-student-politics.html> (14 Oct. 2003).

³ Andrew Blau, "More Than Bit Players: How Information Technology Will Change the Ways Nonprofits and Foundations Work and Thrive in the Information Age," May 2001, Surdna Foundation, <http://www.surdna.org/documents/morefinal.pdf>.

⁴ The E-rate program is administered by the Universal Service Administrative Company (<http://www.sl.universalservice.org/>) on behalf of the FCC (http://www.fcc.gov/web/universal_service/schoolsandlibs.html). For information on the Technology Opportunity Program (formerly the Telecommunications and Information Infrastructure Assistance Program, or TIAAP), see <http://www.ntia.doc.gov/otiahome/top/>.

⁵ Matthew Hindman and Kenneth Neil Cukier, "More News, Less Diversity," *New York Times* 4 June 2003, http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/news/opeds/2003/hindman_cukier_nyt_060403.

⁶ Boris Galitsky and Mark Levene, "On the Economy of Web Links: Simulating the Exchange Process," *First Monday* 9.1 (5 Jan. 2004), http://www.firstmonday.dk/issues/current_issue/galitsky/index.html (19 Jan. 2004).

⁷ Shi Zhou and Raul J. Mondragon, "Analyzing and Modelling the AS-level Internet Topology," Computing Research Repository, <http://arxiv.org/ftp/cs/papers/0303/0303030.pdf> (19 Jan. 2004). See also Clay Shirky, "Power Laws, Weblogs, and Inequality," http://www.shirky.com/writings/powerlaw_weblog.html (19 Jan. 2004).

⁸ As Galitsky and Levene explain, "Google and other Web search engines interpret a link to a Web site as a vote for that Web site by the author of the link, so the more votes a Web site has the more important it is considered. Google also takes into account the importance of the source of a link, so a link from a more prominent site is worth more than a link from a less prominent one. Since Web search engines have become the gatekeepers of the Web, visibility of a site through Web searches has become an essential ingredient for the survival of the site." Galitsky and Levene, "On the Economy of Web Links."

⁹ Hindman and Cukier, "More News, Less Diversity."

¹⁰ Although the Digital Opportunity Investment Trust has not yet been created, \$750,000 was appropriated in 2003 for the Federation of American Scientists to study the project. Kay Howell, "Progress Towards a National Initiative for Information Technology to Improve Learning and Teaching," *EAS Public Interest Report* 56.1 (Spring 2003), <http://www.fas.org/faspir/2003/v56n1/learning.htm> (19 Jan. 2004).

¹¹ These issues were discussed at length by the Advisory Committee on Public Interest Obligations of Digital Television Broadcasters (<http://www.ntia.doc.gov/pubintadvcom/pubint.htm>), the so-called Gore Commission that operated in 1997-98, whose archives are maintained online by the Benton Foundation (<http://www.benton.org/publibrary/policy/tv/piac.html>).

Appendix A

List of Sites Surveyed for Quantitative Assessment

2030 Center
<http://www.2030.org>

4-H
<http://www.4-h.org/>

About-Face
<http://www.about-face.org>

Activist 2000 Project
<http://www.youthactivism.com>

Advocates for Youth
<http://advocatesforyouth.org>

AGirlLikeU.com
<http://www.agirllikeu.com>

Ahimsa Youth Organization
<http://www.ayo.org>

Alliance Working to Achieve Racial Equality
<http://www.uky.edu/StudentOrgs/AWARE/>

Alloy Online
<http://www.alloy.com>

America's Future Foundation
<http://www.americasfuture.org>

America's Promise
<http://www.americaspromise.org/youngleaders/index.cfm>

Americans for a Society Free from Age Restrictions
<http://www.asfar.org>

Americorps
<http://www.americorps.org>

Amigos
<http://edweb.sdsu.edu/people/cguanipa/amigos/>

Anarchist Youth Action
<http://www.infoshop.org/kidz/nay.html>

Are You Into It?
<http://www.areyouintoit.com>

Association for Children's Suffrage
http://www.brown.edu/Students/Association_for_Childrens_Suffrage/

Ayn Rand Institute
http://www.aynrand.org/no_servitude

BAMboozled
<http://www.bamboozled.org>

Bay Positives
<http://www.baypositives.org>

Berkley NAACP Youth Council
<http://www.geocities.com/CollegePark/field/4241>

Berkley Organization for Animal Advocacy
<http://www.ocf.berkeley.edu/~boaa/>

Beta Club
<http://www.betacub.org/>

Beyond Media—Girls, Action, Media
<http://www.beyondmedia.org/gam.html>

Bold Chicago
<http://www.boldchicago.org>

Bolt.com
<http://www.bolt.com>

Boycott the Bell
http://www.ciw-online.org/tz_site-revision/home/home.html

Boys & Girls Club
<http://www.bgca.org/>

Break Away
<http://www.alternativebreaks.org/>

Brown University ACLU
<http://www.brown.edu/Students/ACLU/>

Brown University Coalition for Social Justice
http://www.brown.edu/Students/Coalition_for_Social_Justice/

Bullying Project
<http://www.bullying.org>

By Any Means Necessary
<http://www.bamn.com>

C-Beyond
<http://www.youthec.org/cbeyond/index.htm>

Cal Corps Public Service Center
<http://students.berkeley.edu/calcorps/>

Campaign for a Democratic Future
<http://www.byop.org/cdf/>

Campus Activism
<http://www.campusactivism.org>

Campus Compact
<http://www.compact.org>

Campus Greens
<http://www.campusgreens.org>

Campus Leadership Program
<http://www.leadershipinstitute.org/clp/>

Career Volunteer (Volunteer Smarter)
<http://www.volunteersmarter.org>

Center for Civic Renewal—Sweet Briar College
<http://www.civicrenewal.org/>

Center for Commercial-Free Education
<http://www.commercialfree.org>

Center for Environmental Citizenship
<http://www.envirocitizen.org>

C.O.V.E.—Center for Outreach,
 Volunteerism and Education
<http://offices.colgate.edu/cove/default.htm>

Center for Service, Education and Careers
<http://www.solanco.k12.pa.us/highschool/centerforservi/default.htm>

Center for Teen Empowerment
<http://www.teenempowerment.org>

Center for Young Women's Development
<http://www.cywd.org>

Center for Youth as Resources
<http://www.yar.org>

Channel One
<http://www.channelone.com>

Choice USA http://www.choiceusa.org	College Republican National Committee http://www.crnconline.org/
Choices Campus Community http://www.feministcampus.org/	Common Cause http://www.commoncause.org/youth/
City at Peace http://www.cpnational.org/	Common Good http://aoltimewarnerfoundation.org/empower/common_good.html
City Kids.com http://www.citykids.com	Community Impact http://www.community-impact.net/
City of Los Angeles Youth Council http://www.ci.la.ca.us/cyf/cyfy1.htm	Community Information Corps http://www.westsiddecic.org
City of San Mateo http://www.ci.sanmateo.ca.us/government/board_ya.html	Congressional Youth Leadership Council http://www.cylc.org/
City Year http://www.cityyear.org/young/index.html	Consumer Education for Teens http://www.wa.gov/ago/youth/
Civic Education Project http://www.ctd.northwestern.edu/cep/cep.html	Content of our Character (Voices of Generation X) http://www.contentofourcharacter.org
Civic Works http://www.civicworks.com	Cookeville High School Interact Club http://www.geocities.com/cookeville_interact/
Claremont Students Challenging Racism and (White) Privilege (SCRAP) http://www.canopyweb.com/racism/	COOL (Campus Outreach Opportunity League) http://www.COOL2SERVE.org
Co/Motion (of Alliance for Justice) http://www.comotionmakers.org/	Democracy Matters www.democracymatters.org
College Democrats of America http://www.collegedems.com	Democratic Left at Princeton University http://www.princeton.edu/~dleft/
College Mentors http://www.collegementors.org	Department of Justice http://www.usdoj.gov/kidspage/youth.html
College Republican Federation of Alabama http://www.algop.org/crfa/	Diversity of Thought http://www.diversityofthought.com/

Diversity Works
<http://www.diversityworks.org>

Do Something
<http://www.dosomething.org>

Earth Life
<http://www.earthlife.org>

Earth Team
<http://www.earthteam.net>

Earth Youth
<http://www.earthyouth.net>

Earthforce.org
<http://www.earthforce.org>

Earthnet
<http://www.envirocitizen.org>

East Bay Conservation Corps of Oakland CA
<http://www.eastbaycorps.org/>

Ecopledge.com
<http://www.ecopledge.com>

Environmental Coalition
<http://www.geocities.com/RainForest/Vines/9037>

Equality Today
<http://www.equalitytoday.org>

Family, Career and Community
 Leaders of America
<http://www.fcclainc.org/>

Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)
<http://www.FBI.gov/kids/6th12th/6th12th.htm>

Federal Consumer Information
 Center of Pueblo CO
http://www.pueblo.gsa.gov/cic_text/children/spirit/spirit.htm

Fight for Your Rights
<http://www.ffyr.mtv.com>

FIRSTLink
<http://www.firstlink.org>

Flint Profiles
<http://www.flint.lib.mi.us/flintprofiles/index.html>

Florida Office of Collegiate
 Volunteerism (FOCV)
<http://www.fsu.edu/~focv/>

Foreign Policy Association—Students Corner
http://www.fpa.org/info-url_nocat2405/info-url_nocat.htm

Free Child Project
<http://www.freechild.org>

Free The Planet
<http://www.freetheplanet.org>

Free Thinkers Society
<http://www.freethinkerssociety.org>

Freedom's Answer
<http://www.freedomanswer.net>

Fresh Angles (formerly Teen Voice)
<http://www.freshangles.com>

Friends Committee on National Legislation
<http://www.fcnl.org/young.htm>

Future Farmers of America
<http://www.ffa.org>

Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network
<http://www.glsen.org>

Gay-Straight Alliance Network
<http://www.gsanetwork.org/>

Generation Net
<http://generationnet.org>

Generation Terrorists
<http://free.freespeech.org/genterror/main.html>

Generation Vote.com
<http://www.generationvote.com/>

Genrising (formerly e-teen.net)
<http://www.genrising.com/index.htm>

Girl Scouts of the USA
<http://www.girlscouts.org>

Girls Can Do
<http://www.girlscando.com>

Girls Inc.
<http://www.girlsinc.org/gc/>

Girls, Women and Media Project
<http://www.mediaandwomen.org/>

Global Action Project and Webshop
<http://www.global-action.org>

Global Kids
<http://www.globalkids.org>

Global Response
<http://www.globalresponse.org>

Global Teens
<http://global-teens.org>

Global Youth Action Network
<http://www.youthlink.org>

Global Youth Connect
<http://www.globalyouthconnect.org>

Global Youth Network
<http://www.youthwhocare.com>

Go Girls
<http://www.goldinc.com/gogirls/index.htm>

Grand Traverse Regional Community Foundation
Youth Advisory Council
<http://www.gtrcf.org/yac/>

Gratz Cluster, Youth-Driven
Service-Learning Center
<http://www.gratzclusterydslc.org/>

Harlem Live
<http://harlemlive.org>

Harvard Environmental Action Committee
<http://www.hcs.harvard.edu/~eac/>

High School Journalism
<http://www.highschooljournalism.org>

Hope Street
<http://www.hopestreet.com>

Humane Teen (Humane Society)
<http://www.humaneteen.org/>

I*earn
<http://www.iearn.org>

Idealist.org
<http://www.idealism.org>

Immigrant Voices
<http://www.kqed.org/ednet/youthmedia/immigrant/index.html>

Innovation Center
<http://www.theinnovationcenter.org>

InSite
<http://www.insitement.com/>

International Student Activism Alliance
<http://www.studentactivism.org>

International Student Response Alliance
<http://www.angelfire.com/ia/alpham/whatis.html>

International Youth Leadership Initiative
<http://www.iyli.org>

ISU Filipino Association
<http://www.stuorg.iastate.edu/filipino/>

Join Hands Day
<http://joinhandsday.org>

Just Act
<http://www.justact.org>

Just Think
<http://www.justthink.org>

Katrillion
<http://www.katrillion.com>

Key Club International
<http://www.keyclub.org>

Kids Can Free the Children
<http://www.freethechildren.org>

Kids for Saving Earth
<http://www.kidsforsavingearth.org>

Kids Voting USA
<http://www.kidsvotingusa.org>

Kiwi Box
<http://www.kiwibox.com>

Know Your Rights
<http://www.studentactivism.org>
 LA Youth
<http://www.layouth.com>

Landmark Volunteers
<http://www.volunteers.com/>

Latin American Youth Center
<http://www.layc-dc.org>

Libertarian Rock
<http://libertarianrock.com>

Life on the Edge—Live!
<http://www.family.org/lote/lotelive/3dbb/>

Listen Up!
<http://www.pbs.org/merrow/trt/index.html>

Maine Secretary of State Kids' Page
<http://www.state.me.us/sos/kids/fyigames/fyiinfo.htm>

Make the Road by Walking
<http://www.maketheroad.org/>

Mayor's Youth Action Council—
 City of Richmond, IN
<http://www.ci.richmond.in.us/myac/>

Mennonite Central Committee
<http://www.mcc.org/youth.html>

Methodist Students for an All Inclusive Church
<http://www.rmnetwork.org/mosaic/index.html>

Millennial Politics
<http://www.millennialpolitics.com/>

Minnesota Legislature—Links for Youth
<http://www.leg.state.mn.us/leg/youth/>

Minors Organization for Rights Expansion
 (M.O.R.E.)
<http://scroll.to/freedom>

MIT Libertarians
<http://web.mit.edu/libertarians/www/>

NAACP Youth and College Voter Empowerment
<http://www.naacp.org/work/voter/ycvoter.shtml>

Nashville Youth Pulse
<http://www.nashvillepulse.org>

National Campaign Against Youth Violence
<http://www.noviolence.net/perspective/index.html>

National Citizens Crime Prevention Campaign
<http://www.weprevent.org>

National Coalition on Black Civic Participation
<http://www.bigvote.org>

National Student Campaign Against Hunger and Homelessness
<http://www.pirg.org/nscahh/>

National Student Partnerships
<http://www.nspnet.org>

National Youth and Students Peace Coalition
<http://www.nyspc.net/home.html>

National Youth Connection
<http://www.thenyc.org>

National Youth Rights Association
<http://www.youthrights.org>

Nebraska Governor's Youth Website
<http://www.neyouth.com/index.htm>

New Light Leadership Council
<http://www.nllc.org>

New Millenium Young Voters Project
<http://www.stateofthevote.org>

No More Prisons
<http://www.nomoreprisons.org>

NoTobacco
<http://notobacco.org>

Oblivion.net
<http://Oblivion.net>

OutProud
<http://www.outproud.org>

P.A.V.E
<http://www.helppavetheway.org>

PBS In the Mix
<http://www.pbs.org/inthemix/>

PBS Kids—Don't Buy It!
<http://pbskids.org/dontbuyit/>

Peacefire
<http://www.peacefire.org>

Peace Incorporated
<http://www.peaceinc.org>

Pitch In!
<http://www.pitchin.org/index.html>

Political Teen Online
<http://www.politicalteen.com/>

Power to the Youth
<http://www.youthpower.net>

Prince William County Youth Pages
<http://www.co.prince-william.va.us/custom/youth.asp>

Princeton Project 55
<http://project55.org>

Princeton University Student Volunteers Council
<http://svc.westside.com/default.view>

Pro-Youth Pages
<http://www.geocities.com/hatredsucks/>

- Project 540
<http://www.project540.org>
- Project Vote Smart Youth Inclusion Project
<http://www.vote-smart.org/yip/>
- Provo City Youth Government
<http://www.provo.org/council/pcyg/pcyg.html>
- Puente—University of Pennsylvania
<http://www.seas.upenn.edu/~puente/index.html>
- Radio Rookies
<http://www.wnyc.org/radiorookies/>
- React.com
<http://react.com>
- Red Cross—Junior Red Cross/youth
<http://www.redcross.org/services/youth/>
- Reform America, Inc.
<http://www.reformamericainc.org/>
- Refuse and Resist Youth Network
<http://www.refuseandresist.org/youthnet/index.html>
- Republican Youth Majority
<http://www.rym.org>
- Rock the Vote
<http://www.rockthevote.org/>
- Rocky Mountain Youth Corps
<http://www.youthcorps.org/>
- Rotoract
<http://www.rotaract.org/>
- Ruckus
<http://www.ruckuscollective.org/>
- S.C.A.L.E.—Student Coalition for Action in Literacy Education
<http://www.readwriteact.org/>
- S.T.A.R.C. Alliance (Students Transforming and Resisting Corporations)
<http://www.starcalliance.org/>
- San Francisco Youth Commission
http://www.ci.sf.ca.us/site/youth_commission_index.asp
- SCALE (Student Committee Against Labor Exploitation)
<http://www.nlcnet.org/scale/main.htm>
- Seattle Metro Young Republicans
<http://www.seattleyr.org/>
- Seattle Youth Involvement Network
<http://www.seattleyouth.org>
- SEED (Students Envisioning Equality through Diversity)
<http://www.olemiss.edu/orgs/seed/>
- Seeking Harmony in Neighborhoods Everyday (SHiNE)
<http://www.shine.com/>
- Serve Houston Youth Corps
<http://servehouston.org/>
- SERVEnet
<http://www.servenet.org>
- Sierra Student Coalition
<http://www.ssc.org>
- SOUL
<http://www.youthec.org/soul/index.htm>

Spirit of Youth
<http://www.spiritofyouth.org>

Spiritual Youth for Reproductive Freedom
<http://www.syrf.org>

Speak Up!
<http://www.speakupny.org/agenda.html>

Stanford in Government
<http://www.stanford.edu/group/SIG/>

Stop the Hate
<http://www.stopthehate.org>

Straight Scoop News Bureau
<http://www.straightscoop.org>

Street-Level Youth Media
<http://streetlevel.iit.edu/index.html>

Student Animal Rights Alliance
<http://www.defendanimals.org>

Student Association for Freedom of Expression
<http://www.mit.edu:8001/activities/safe/home.html>

Student Coalition Against Labor Exploitation
<http://www-scf.usc.edu/~scale/html/History.html>

Student Conservation Association
<http://www.sca-inc.org>

Student Discourse
<http://www.studentdiscourse.com>

Student Environmental Action Coalition
<http://www.seac.org>

Student Global Aids Campaign
<http://www.fightglobalaids.org/>

Student Leadership Services
<http://www.sadd.org>

Student Liberation Action Movement (SLAM)
<http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Lobby/6353/>

Student Peace Action Network
<http://www.studentpeaceaction.org/>

Student PIRGs
<http://www.studentpirgs.org>

Student Pledge Against Gun Violence
<http://www.pledge.org/pledges/index.html>

Student Press Law Center
<http://www.splc.org>

Student Voices Project
<http://student-voices.org/>

Students Against Name Tags Association
http://members.tripod.com/SANTA_Club/welcomepage.htm

Students Against Violence Everywhere
<http://www.nationalsave.org/index.asp>

Students for Sensible Drug Policy
<http://www.ssdp.org>

Students for the Second Amendment
<http://www.sf2a.org/>

Students Teaching Against Tobacco in Connecticut (STATIC)
<http://www.ctstatic.org/>

Students Transforming and Resisting Corporations
<http://www.starcalliance.org>

Students United for a Responsible
Global Environment
<http://www.unc.edu/surge/index.html>

Students Working Against Tobacco
<http://www.wholetruth.com>

Students.gov
<http://www.students.gov>

T.E.E.N.S.—Shaker Village Democracy Project
<http://www.global-teens.org>

Take Action Online
<http://www.takeactiononline.org>

Talking Talons Youth Leadership
<http://www.talkingtalons.org>

Teaching.com
<http://www.teaching.com/act/>

Teen Aids
<http://www.teenaid.org>

Teen Freedom Corps
<http://www.teenfreedomcorps.org/index.asp>

Teen FX.com
<http://www.teenfx.com>

Teen Hoopla
<http://www.ala.org/teenhoopla/>

Teen Power Politics
<http://www.teenpowerpolitics.com>

Teen Slant
<http://www.teenslant.com>

Teen Voices
<http://www.teenvoices.com>

Teen Web Online
<http://www.twonline.cjb.net/>

Teenagers for Republican Victory
<http://www.gopyouth.com>

TeenInk Online Magazine
<http://teenink.com>

Teens Acting for Peace (TAP)
<http://www.ipj-ppj.org/TAP%20Home.htm>

Teens Inc.
<http://www.teensinc.org>

Teenwire.com
<http://www.teenwire.com>

Terra Firma
<http://www.utah.edu/green/>

Third Millenium
<http://www.thirdmil.org/index.html>

Tobacco Free Vermont
<http://www.tobaccofreevermont.org>

Tolerance.org: Mix It Up!
<http://www.tolerance.org/teens/index.jsp>

Tucson Teens
<http://www.ci.tucson.az.us/teens/Voting/voting.html>

UNICEF Voices of Youth
<http://www.unicef.org/voy>

Unitel Stop Sweatshops Campaign
<http://www.uniteunion.org/sweatshops/hsas/hsas.html>

United Leaders
<http://www.unitedleaders.org>

United National Indian Tribal Youth
<http://www.unityinc.org>

United States Student Organization
<http://www.usstudents.org>

United Students Against Sweatshops
<http://www.usasnet.org>

University of Southern California
 Volunteer Center
http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/volunteer_center/Volunteer.html

Urban Corps of San Diego
<http://www.urbancorpsd.org/>

Vegetarian Youth Network
<http://www.geocities.com/RainForest/Vines/4482>

Virginia Youth Service Council
<http://www.vysc.org>

Volunteer at Monterey
<http://www.monterey.org/volunteer/>

Volunteers
<http://www.volunteers.com>

Volunteer Action Center—
 Florida International University
<http://www.fiu.edu/~time4chg/>

Volunteer Center of Contra Costa
 (Youth Action Council)
<http://www.helpnow.org/youth.html>

Volunteer Center of Durham
<http://www.thevolunteercenter.org/yva.html>

Volunteer Center of Maricopa (Phoenix)
<http://www.volunteerphoenix.org>

Volunteer Center of San Francisco
<http://www.vcsf.org>

Volunteer Center—Iowa State University
<http://www.stuorg.iastate.edu/volunteers/>

Volunteer Illini Projects, Inc.
<http://www.uiuc.edu/ro/vip/>

VOX—Youth Communication
<http://www.youthcommunication-vox.org/>

We Interrupt this Message
<http://www.interrupt.org>

What Kids Can Do
<http://www.whatkidscando.org/home.html>

What's Up!
<http://www.whatsup.org/home.asp>

WireTap
<http://www.wiretapmag.org>

Wisconsin Student Public Interest Research Group
<http://www.wispirg>

Workers Rights Consortium
<http://www.workersrights.org>

Yesfresno.org
<http://www.yesfresno.org>

Yesworld
<http://www.yesworld.org>

YMCA—Civic Connections
<http://www.vtymca.org/cc/ccindex.html>

YMCA—Earth Services Corps
<http://www.yesc.org>

Young America's Foundation
<http://www.yaf.org>

Young Americans for Freedom
<http://www.yaf.com>

Young Democrats of America
<http://www.yda.org>

Young Democratic Socialists
<http://www.ydsusa.org>

Young People's Socialist League
<http://www.ypsl.net>

Young Politicians of America
<http://www.ypa.org>

Young Republicans Online Community Network
<http://www.yrock.com>

YourVoteCounts.org
<http://yourvotecounts.org>

Youth Act!
<http://www.streetlaw.org/youthact>

Youth Action Net
<http://www.youthactionnet.org>

Youth Adelantando
<http://www.pica.ws/ya/>

Youth Advocacy Coalition
<http://www.nyacyouth.org/>

Youth and Civil Liberties Council
<http://www.aclu-wi.org/youth/index.html>

Youth Communication
<http://www.youthcomm.org>

Youth Communist League – USA
<http://www.yclusa.org>

Youth Corps for Animals
<http://www.youthforanimals.org>

Youth Crime Watch of America
<http://www.ycwa.org>

Youth Empowerment Center
<http://www.youthec.org>

Youth for Environmental Service (YES)
<http://www.yes1.org>

Youth for International Socialism
<http://www.newyouth.com>

Youth For Social Action
<http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Lobby/2684>

Youth Force
http://www.nonviolentpeaceforce.org/Youth_force/index.htm

Youth Force Coalition
<http://www.youthec.org/youthforce/index.htm>

Youth HIV
<http://www.youthhiv.org>

Youth in Philanthropy
http://fdncenter.org/focus/youth/kids_teens/

Youth Leadership Initiative—University of Virginia
<http://www.youthleadershipinitiative.com>

Youth Leadership Institute
<http://www.yli.org>

Youth Link
<http://www.yl-va.org/v2/>

Youth Media Corps Juvenile Justice Campaign
<http://www.kqed.org/ednet/youthmedia/justice/index.html>

Youth Noise
<http://www.youthnoise.org>

Youth Organizers
<http://www.americas.org/youth/>

Youth Organizing Communities/Schools Not Jails
<http://www.schoolsnotjails.com>

Youth Outlook
<http://www.youthoutlook.org>

Youth Pride
<http://www.youthpride.org>

Youth Radio
<http://www.youthradio.org>

Youth Resource
<http://www.youthresource.com>

Youth Service America
<http://www.ysa.org>

Youth Service California
<http://www.yscal.org>

Youth Tree USA
<http://www.youthtreeusa.com>

Youth Voice.Net
<http://www.americas.org/youth/>

Youth Voice in Local Government
<http://www.ci.mankato.mn.us/youthvoiceingov/>

Youth Volunteer Corps
<http://www.yvca.org/>

Youth Vote Coalition
<http://www.youthvote.org>

Youth Web Online
<http://www.youthwebonline.com>

Youth-e-vote
<http://www.youthevote.net>

YouthChannel.org
<http://www.youthchannel.org>

YouthVoice.net
<http://www.indiana.edu/%7Eythvoice/>

Y-Press
<http://www.ypress.org>

Appendix B

List of Sites Surveyed for Qualitative Analysis

About-Face

Tolerance and diversity

<http://www.about-face.org/>

Advocates for Youth

Activism

<http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/ffyr/>

America's Future Foundation

Voting

<http://www.americasfuture.org/>

America's Promise

Positive Youth Development

<http://www.americaspromise.org/>

Americans for a Society Free of Age Restrictions

Activism

<http://www.asfar.org/>

Appalachian Media Institute

Youth journalism and media

<http://www.appalshop.org/ami/>

Are You Into It

Positive Youth Development

<http://www.areyouintoit.com/>

Boy Scouts

Positive Youth Development

<http://www.scouting.org/>

Boy's Life

Positive Youth Development

<http://www.boyslife.org/>

Boys and Girls Club of America

Positive Youth Development

<http://www.bgca.org/>

Center for Youth as Resources

Philanthropy

<http://yar.org/>

Character Education Partnership

Positive Youth Development

<http://www.character.org/>

College Democrats of America

Voting

<http://www.collegedems.com/>

College Republican National Committee

Voting

<http://www.crnc.org/>

Community Information Corps

Local engagement

<http://www.westsidecic.org>

Community Technology Centers' Network

Access and equity

<http://www.ctcnet.org>

Content of Our Character

Positive Youth Development

<http://www.contentofourcharacter.org/>

Diversity Works

Tolerance and diversity

<http://www.diversityworks.org/>

Do Something
Local engagement
<http://www.dosomething.org/>

Don't Buy It
Activism
<http://pbskids.org/dontbuyit/>

Fight For Your Rights: Protect Yourself
Activism
<http://www.mtv.com/onair/ffyr/protect/>

Free the Planet!
Activism
<http://www.freetheplanet.org/>

Freedom's Answer
Voting
<http://www.freedomanswer.org/>

Generation Vote
Voting
<http://www.generationvote.com/>

Girl Scouts
Positive Youth Development
<http://www.girlscouts.org/>

Global Response
Global issues
<http://www.globalresponse.org>

Global Youth Action Network
Global issues
<http://www.takingitglobal.org/>

Habitat for Humanity
Volunteering
<http://www.habitat.org/>

HarlemLive
Access and equity
<http://www.harlemlive.org/>

Hunger Site
Philanthropy
<http://www.hungersite.com/>

Idealist
Volunteering
<http://www.idealists.org>

iEARN
Global issues
<http://www.iearn.org>

Just 4 Girls
Positive Youth Development
<http://jfg.girlscouts.org/>

Kids Voting USA
Voting
<http://www.kidsvotingusa.org>

Listen Up!
Youth journalism and media
<http://www.listenup.org/>

My Hero
Positive Youth Development
<http://www.myhero.com/home.asp>

NAACP Youth and College Voter Empowerment
Voting
<http://www.naacp.org/work/voter/ycvoter.shtml>

National 4-H Headquarters
Positive Youth Development
<http://www.4h-usa.org>

National 4-H Web
Positive Youth Development
<http://www.4-h.org/>

National Coalition on Black
 Civic Engagement Black Youth Vote
Voting
<http://www.bigvote.org/byv.htm>

National Youth Advocacy Coalition
Activism
<http://www.nyacyouth.org/>

NetAid
Volunteering
<http://www.netaid.org/>

No War on Youth
Activism
<http://www.colorlines.com/waronyouth>

Out Proud
Tolerance and diversity
<http://www.outproud.org/>

Outpath
Tolerance and diversity
<http://www.outpath.com/>

Peacefire
Activism
<http://www.peacefire.org/>

Philanthropic Youth Council of Ridgefield
Philanthropy
<http://www.ridgefieldcf.org/youth.html>

Points of Light Foundation
Volunteering
<http://www.pointsoflight.org/>

Power to the Youth
Activism
<http://www.youthpower.net/>

Republican Youth Majority
Voting
<http://www.rym.org/>

Rock the Vote
Voting
<http://www.rockthevote.org/>

SERVEnet
Volunteering
<http://www.servenet.org>

Service Leader
Volunteering
<http://www.serviceleader.org/vv/>

SEX, ETC.
Activism
<http://www.sexetc.org/>

SHiNE
Positive Youth Development
<http://www.shine.com/>

Stop the Hate
Tolerance and diversity
<http://www.stopthehate.org/>

Street-Level Youth Media
Access and equity
<http://streetlevel.iit.edu/>

Student Public Interest Research Groups (PIRGs)
Activism
<http://www.studentpirgs.org/>

Students Against Destructive Decisions
Activism
<http://www.saddonline.com/>

Studio 2B
Positive Youth Development
<http://www.gsiec.org/STUDIO2B.htm>

TakingITGlobal
Global issues
<http://www.takingitglobal.org/>

TeenPolitics.com
Activism
<http://www.teenpolitics.com/>

Tolerance.org
Tolerance and diversity
<http://www.tolerance.org/teens/>

Tropical America
Access and equity
<http://www.tropicalamerica.com/>

United Students Against Sweatshops
Philanthropy
<http://www.usasnet.org/>

Voices of Youth
Global issues
<http://www.unicef.org/voy>

WireTap
Youth journalism and media
<http://www.wiretapmag.org/>

YMCA
Positive Youth Development
<http://www.ymca.net/index.jsp>

YO! Youth Outlook
Youth journalism and media
<http://www.youthoutlook.org/mainframe.php3>

Young Democrats of America
Voting
<http://www.yda.org/>

Young Republican's Online Community Network
Voting
<http://www.yrock.com/>

Young Women's Web
Positive Youth Development
http://www.worldywca.org/young_womens/

Youth Communication
Youth journalism and media
<http://www.youthcomm.org/>

Youth Communication (of Atlanta)
Local engagement
<http://www.youthcommunication-vox.org/>

Youth Crime Watch of America
Philanthropy
<http://www.ycwa.org/start/index.html>

Youth Empowerment Program
Positive Youth Development
<http://yep.cohhio.org/>

Youth for Life
Philanthropy
<http://www.members.tripod.com/~joseromia/>

Youth Grantmakers
Philanthropy
<http://www.youthgrantmakers.org/>

Youth Media Corps
Youth journalism and media
<http://www.kqed.org/topics/education/medialiteracy/youthmedia/>

Youth Media Council
Local engagement
<http://www.youthmediacouncil.org>

Youth Philanthropy Initiative of Indiana
Philanthropy
<http://www.ypin.org/>

Youth Radio
Youth journalism and media
<http://www.youthradio.org/>

Youth Service America
Volunteering
<http://www.ysa.org>

Youth Vote Coalition

Voting

<http://www.youthvote.org>

YouthNOISE

Philanthropy

<http://www.youthnoise.com>

YWCA

Positive Youth Development

<http://www.ywca.org/>

Appendix C

Websites Surveyed for 9/11 Study (Chapter 5)

Sites surveyed within days of the attacks

Bolt.com

<http://www.bolt.com>

ChannelOne.com

<http://www.channelone.com>

ChickClick

<http://www.chickclick.com/>

DoSomething

<http://www.dosomething.org>

Gurl.com

<http://gurl.com/connect/frontpage.html>

HarlemLive

<http://harlemlive.org>

Just Response

<http://www.justresponse.org/>

Listen Up!

<http://www.pbs.org/merrow/trt/index.html>

MTV's Fight for Your Rights

<http://www.ffyr.mtv.com>

9-11 Peace

Site no longer available

Peace Protest Net

<http://pax.protest.net/>

Peaceful Justice

Site no longer available

People for Peace

<http://members.aol.com/pforpeace/>

Reform and Resist

<http://www.refuseandresist.org/youthnet/index.html>

RightGrrl

<http://www.rightgrrl.com/>

YouthNOISE

<http://www.youthnoise.org>South Carolina Educational Television's
BridgeBuilders<http://www.knowitall.org/bridgebuilders/>

Stop the Hate

<http://www.stopthehate.org>

Teen.com

Site no longer available

TeenFX.com

<http://www.teenfx.com>

360 Hip Hop

Site no longer available

WireTap

<http://www.wiretapmag.org>

Young America's Foundation
<http://www.yaf.org>

Youth Service America's ServeNet
<http://www.servenet.org>

YouthRadio
<http://www.youthradio.org>

Sites studied over time

Americorps
<http://www.americorps.org>

Channel One
<http://www.channelone.com>

Do Something
<http://www.dosomething.org>

Harlem Live
<http://harlemlive.org>

Just Response
<http://www.justresponse.org/>

Peace Protest Net
<http://pax.protest.net/>

Peaceful Justice
Site no longer available

People for Peace
<http://members.aol.com/pforpeace/>

RightGrrl
<http://www.rightgrrl.com/>

ServeNet
<http://www.servenet.org>

Stop the Hate
<http://www.stopthehate.org>

Teenfx.com
<http://www.teenfx.com>

360 Hip Hop
Site no longer available

WireTap
<http://www.wiretapmag.org>

Young America's Foundation
<http://www.yaf.org>

YouthNOISE
<http://www.youthnoise.org>